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The Truth about the Stage

By Corin

London: Wyman & Sons, Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields, W.C.
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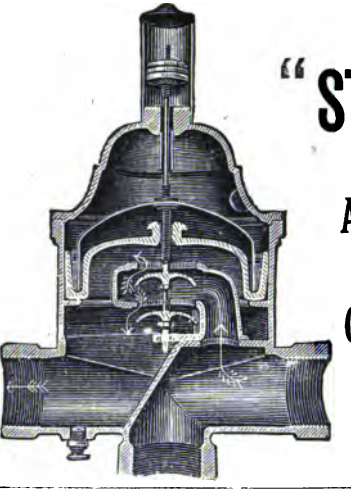

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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE STAGE.

By CORIN.

"SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF DENMARK."
Shakespeare.

LONDON:
WYMAN & SONS, 74-76, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS.
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PREFACE.

THIS book has been written with a twofold object. Firstly, to point out the temptations and dangers which beset aspirants for histrionic fame, and to warn stage-struck youths and maidens, who wish to quit the sphere of life in which circumstances have placed them, for the perilous and precarious vocation of a player.

Too many persons are, moth-like, dazzled by the artificial glitter of the stage. Theatrical life is surrounded with a halo of romance, which is rarely dispelled until the fatal step is taken and when it is too late to turn back.

After twenty years' experience in London and the provinces, I have come to the conclusion that the ephemeral glory of the stage is not worth giving the best years of one's life to obtain.

The actor has no social status, his calling does not rank with the other professions, and only the few who advance to the front are recognised beyond the confines of the theatrical world.

The black sheep of the stage, sketched in the following pages, are typical of at least sixty per cent. of the players of this country. I have been careful to

> "Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice,"

and I am able to prove every statement I have made with regard to the Bohemianism which characterises the larger section of the dramatic "profession," and the low standard of morality that unfortunately exists.

On the other hand, I have acknowledged the noble efforts of the few high-minded managers, actors, and actresses, who are doing their utmost to improve the stage by imparting a healthful tone to the drama and its exponents.

It is also my earnest desire, as will be found in Chapters XI. and XII., to direct public attention to the want of a proper training-college for actors and actresses, based on a system hitherto unattempted.

For the reformation of the stage all conscientious artistes must fervently pray. None, save the pariahs of the theatrical world and the vampires who fasten upon ambitious amateurs, and marshal them to ruin, will regret the day when all theatres are used for legitimate purposes only, and when the love of dramatic art for the sake of its elevating influence shall be the only passport to the British stage.

CORIN.

LONDON, 1895.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE STAGE.

CHAPTER I.

MY FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THE STAGE.

My First Pantomime—A Stage-struck Infant—Kean Redivivus—A Pilgrimage to the London Theatres—A Manager's Advice—The Theatrical Organ—The Fatal Advertisement—My First Engagement—The Theatre Royal, Tullibody—The Drunken Tragedian—A Swindling Manager—Lodging Hunting—A Scotch Shanty—Sanitary Affairs in the Highlands—The Dismal Comedian—A Versatile Actor—Sandy Macdonald's Story—A Wonderful Theatrical Poster—The Rival Gaffs—Refreshments—The Struggle between a Man and a Donkey—Wreck of the Royal Theatre of Varieties—A Conspiracy to Swindle—Scotch Cooking—A Fluffy Rehearsal—The Scenery of a "Fit-up"—An Inhuman Father—The Fate of the Daughter of the Drunken Tragedian—A Mushroom Manager and his Victims—Immorality of Low Actors and Actresses—The Treasury—Half-a-crown for a Week's Work—A Scotch Sabbath—The Drunkards' Train—Theatrical Wardrobes—The Performance that did not come off—An Audience of Two—The Behaviour of the Dead-heads—Our Visit to the Town Hall—The Christy Minstrels—A Pack of Drunkards, and Worse—My Escape from Tullibody.

MY dear mother little knew the harm she was doing to her favourite son, one afternoon, thirty-five years ago, when she coaxed him to sleep, in order that he should keep his eyes open during the performance of the pantomime at the Theatre Royal, Irwell, that evening.

She, good soul, did not foresee the effect of the bewitching smiles of the fairies, the loves of Prince Lionheart and little Miss Prettymiss, the gorgeous transformation scene, and the insane tricks of clown and pantaloon, beyond the transitory pleasure of a child who sees for the first time the favourite characters of his story-books in real flesh and blood, walking about, and doing all, and a great deal more, than is set down for them in the old-fashioned nursery tales so familiar to English boys and girls. Could she have looked into "the seeds of time," and unrolled the panorama of the future, as she dozed in her rocking-chair, singing a lullaby, while watching her child's eyes as they alternately opened and closed under the soothing influence of a loving mother's voice, she would rather have dressed him for the grave than the theatre.

Happily for her own peace of mind, my mother was not inclined to philosophy. She did not speculate upon the future. Few mothers who take their little ones to revel in the fun of a Christmas pantomime think of more than the present enjoyment of their darlings and their own amusement for the time being.

The show at which I assisted that night—poor though it may have been, compared with the great productions of the present day,—made a lasting impression upon me. Like most children, I believed all the stories I heard about Fairyland, and that evening my dreams were realised! I was amongst the good fairies. I saw them, heard them speak, and witnessed their brave deeds. As I beheld their haunts all ablaze with gold, silver, and precious stones, and compared my plain stuff frock with

their princely robes, I yearned to be one of them ; and as the green curtain fell upon that fascinating scene, child that I was, I regretted being under parental thraldom ; and during the ride home I speculated upon the time when I should be able to cast in my lot with the "happy players."

I was stage-struck at the early age of six. The nursery was my theatre, and the company included myself and my two sisters, aged respectively four and two years. Later on, at school, I took a part in an acting charade, and so distinguished myself that the head master singled me out, and gave me an illustrated copy of Shakespeare as a prize for elocution. Fatal mistake! If he had given me a good caning instead, I should have blessed him this day. Richard III. said, "'A little flattery sometimes does well"; in my case, a little flattery turned my head. I fancied that I was a born Roscius. Had not the head master, a man who could declaim Antigone in the original Greek, and who was familiar with the works of all the ancient playwrights, admired my acting? I appealed to my father, I showed him my prize, and repeated the words of our head master, and I was not a little disgusted when the author of my being tried hard to convince me that the actor's calling was not held in high esteem, and that the monarch on the stage was only a very ordinary person outside the theatre. Like most dutiful sons, I believed that my father only threw cold water upon my romantic notions because his frigid, matter-of-fact nature was not in harmony with my own warm, ideal-seeking, aërial castle-building temperament. For the first time I

returned to school with a light heart; at every available opportunity I was studying scenes from "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello," "Richard," and "The Merchant of Venice." How many Desdemonas I smothered in the dormitory, or the number of Macduffs and Richmonds I encountered every night, I cannot now recollect. I was acting mad; before I left school I was so apt with my Shakespearian quotations, that I was nicknamed *Kean Redivivus*, and never did I feel so happy as when I was in the midst of an admiring crowd of youngsters, spouting from the immortal bard.

When my father selected the profession he decided I should adopt, I began my duties at the age of nineteen with unfeigned repugnance. I lamented the blindness and want of discrimination displayed by all my friends. My mother was inclined to admit that I showed signs of histrionic talent; but my father and a stern old uncle declared that I could not read half a dozen lines of blank verse. Whenever I hinted that I should like to join the profession, I was invariably told by my male relatives that if I ventured to exhibit my imbecilities before the public I should certainly be pelted off the stage.

Time has proved that these prophecies were never fulfilled. I have been before the public nearly twenty years without being told that I could not read blank verse, and my head has not yet made acquaintance with a single ginger-beer bottle.

In spite of threats, I managed to attend the theatre pretty regularly while I was studying for my intended profession. My mother was in the secret, but, knowing

too well the severity of my father, she never betrayed me. When I expected to be out very late, she used to say, "Do not say anything to the servants, for fear they may tell your father; I will make some excuse to come down and let you in."

Here I must do my mother justice. Although she connived at my acts of disobedience, and aided me in my peccadilloes, she never for one moment believed that I was likely to come to harm.

Fond of the drama herself, she, in her ignorance of the stage and its effects, swallowed all I told her about the "noble" art, the moral influence of the theatre, and a lot more of the rubbish I believed in myself at the time. This brief explanation is necessary, lest the reader may feel inclined to censure my mother for not informing my father of my frequent visits to the play-house.

One night, after witnessing the performance of a romantic drama,—a bad adaptation of Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables,"—I resolved to sacrifice everything, and try my fortune upon the stage. The man who played Jean Valjean, the hero, did not satisfy me; I was not led away by the applause of a provincial audience.

In spite of my years, I knew that in the hands of a capable actor the character of Jean might be made a grand impersonation, and I was vain enough to think that I could play it better than the man whose name was starred all over the town. Perhaps I was no more to blame than the ladies and gentlemen of the present day, who believe that it is the easiest thing in the world to step from the office stool or the drawing-room to the stage.

and, without serving even a short apprenticeship, to mount the topmost rung of the histrionic ladder.

In the absence of my father, who had gone over to Ireland on business, I made a pilgrimage to the London theatres.

I called upon one manager after another, including two or three who have engaged me many times since I joined the profession, but I failed to impress them with my appearance. One said I was too short; another dismissed me with a sneer, remarking that the stage was already overcrowded with vain amateurs. The lessee of a West-end theatre, a man who was well-known for his benevolence and protection of young people, chatted kindly to me, and advised me rather to buy a broom and sweep a crossing than to join the theatrical profession. After spending a week in the metropolis, I returned home in a very disconsolate mood. I had discovered that it was not so easy to get a footing upon the stage as I had imagined. While in London, I came across a copy of the *Epoch*, the only recognised theatrical journal at that time, and so pleased was I with the columns of weak adulation I found in its pages, that I ordered the newsagent at the railway-station to supply me with a copy every week, in order that I might be well posted in theatrical events. One Saturday evening, while perusing the *Epoch*, my eye fell upon an advertisement expressed in the following terms :—

WANTED, a JUVENILE MAN to support an eminent tragedian, now on tour in the North. An excellent opportunity for a gentlemanly amateur. Must dress well on and off the stage.—Apply, until Saturday next, to Manager, Theatre Royal, Maggieknocketer, N.B.

"An excellent opportunity for a gentlemanly amateur!" Here was a chance for me. Had I not played with success before that eminent critic, the head master of Irwell Grammar School? Surely I could please the Maggieknocketerians. I had not the remotest idea of the position of Maggieknocketer on the map of the United Kingdom, nor did I care about the locality of the temple where the eminent tragedian "strutted his fretful hour upon the stage." If he had been acting at Herculaneum or Pompeii, I would willingly have joined him at nothing per week, my own wardrobe included, so little did I trouble my head about such commonplace realities as £. s. d. and bread and cheese. Without losing a moment, after I had recovered from the first intoxicating effects of that fatal advertisement, I penned a long letter to the manager of the Maggieknocketer Theatre, almost begging him to give me a trial. I offered my services gratuitously until I proved myself of some value. In addition to playing the juvenile parts in tragedies, comedies, and farces, I agreed to do the acting management in the daytime, keep the books, and copy out all the parts for the rest of the company! Four days of wretched suspense passed before I received a reply to my letter, and when the postman placed in my hand a soiled envelope, bearing the Scotch postmark, I dared not open it for a few minutes for fear of a refusal. I tried to break the seal, but my fingers failed to perform their functions. Thrusting the letter into my pocket, I rushed to my bedroom, there to wait until my agitation ceased. Nervousness, however, gave way to curiosity, and with difficulty I read the following lines:—

T. R., Maggieknocketer, N.B.
July —, 18—.

Sir,—I agree to your terms. You can join us next Monday at Tullibody. Opening part, Malcolm, in "Macbeth."

Yours truly,
THEOPHILUS MCFUDGE.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when I received the letter. At ten, the housemaid startled me out of my reverie to announce supper. For four hours I had been engaged in a severe mental struggle. Duty demanded obedience to my parents. Inclination, stimulated by McFudge's brief letter of engagement, pointed to Scotland, and conjured up scenes in which I was the central figure. In that day-dream I saw many beautiful women paying homage to the new Roscius who had eclipsed Garrick, Kemble, Kean, and all the modern tragedians. Amongst the worshippers at the shrine of the great actor were peers, eminent statesmen, baronesses, and the rest of the crowd who follow in the train of Fortune's favourites.

Two days after the receipt of McFudge's letter I was on my way to Scotland.

To avoid the bitter agony of parting, I left a note for my mother, begging her forgiveness, and promising never to disgrace her. I did not disclose my destination; I wished her to find me out through the daily papers, after I had achieved the greatness of which I was in search. The journey to Tullibody was long and tedious, and when the train stopped at the little railway-station, I was well-nigh exhausted from excitement and suspense. I

had written to McFudge, stating the time I expected to arrive, and other particulars about the train, which I had found out after a long and exhaustive search, aided by one of the booking clerks at Irwell station; but not a soul came to meet me. I was rather discomfited at this apparent neglect; I expected the manager and the eminent tragedian to turn out to welcome the new juvenile man. After waiting on the platform for about half an hour, I went in search of the station-master. Scotch railway officials are rarely communicative, but this one proved an exception to the rule. I first inquired the way to the Theatre Royal; the good man evidently thought me daft, for he only stared at me and grinned.

"Will you please direct me to the theatre?" I repeated, rather sharply.

"The theatre!" he exclaimed. "Why there's nane nearer than Glasgy, and you'll nae get there the nicht."

"What the deuce do you mean? I want to be directed to the Theatre Royal, Tullibody. I am engaged by the manager, Mr. Theophilus McFudge, to play the juvenile business, and——"

"McFudge, McFudge," interrupted the station-master, turning to a porter who had just crossed the line to learn the cause of our dispute; "isna that the name o' that maan wha brocht tha play-actors on their luggage frae Maggieknocketer yestreen?"

"Yes, sir!" replied the porter, with a broad grin.

"Brought them on their luggage?" I asked inquiringly, wondering what mode of conveyance that might be.

"Yes," said the station-master, "the puir deils hadna a saxpence amang them, sa they were obliged ta traavel on their boxes and scenery. They were sa hard up that they begget me ta lat them hae their things afore they peit the fares at this end. As I didna want ta get the station-maester at Maggieknocketer inta trouble for latting them hae their tickets, I gave the maan they ca' McFudge leave ta tak the stuff awa, sa that they can play on Monday nicht; and the first siller they tak will be peit to the railway company, or my name's nae Donald McNab."

This piece of information staggered me, and when the porter offered to show me the way to the Oddfellows' Hall, where the eminent tragedian was announced to play Macbeth, a suspicion crossed my mind that I had nibbled too eagerly at the bait; and I almost wished myself back in my comfortable home at Irwell.

As we entered the main street of the town, I noticed an extraordinary-looking man with a roll of theatrical bills under his arm. He was standing on the doorstep of a small public-house, where he had been delivering a bill.

"This is the bill-sticker," I thought. "He will give me all the information I require." I dismissed the porter with a tip, and advancing towards my imaginary bill-poster, I said, "I'll give you sixpence if you'll take me to the theatre."

Conceive my astonishment when the man, instead of cheerfully accepting my offer, drew himself up, and scowled at me with an air of offended dignity. Before he opened his mouth, I had time to take stock of his

personal appearance. He was the very picture of Shakespeare's Bardolph; his face was all ablaze with grog-blossoms, he was dressed in a long-skirted brown frock-coat, on the breast of which was a thick coating composed of grease and beer-droppings; his buttons were of iron,—once upon a time they had been covered with cloth, but for years, his most intimate acquaintances declared, he had sported the metal shanks; the skirts of the coat were so long that very little of his trousers were visible; indeed, he remarked to me, when we were on friendly terms, that his long coat covered a multitude of sins. His boots, or trotter-cases, as he delighted to call them, were full of gaping wounds, although he had made frequent attempts to close them with black thread. His head was covered with what had once passed for a black silk hat; but when I first saw it there was not a vestige of black silk visible, the brim was laden with grease, and the upper part resembled a circular block of Nixey's solid black-lead.

When he had crushed me with his tragic glare, he exclaimed, in a deep gin-and-fog voice:

"Sir-r-r, do you know who I am?"

"Yes," I replied, "the bill-sticker."

"Sir-r-r," he continued, "although I condescend to leave a few bills at certain houses of call in the town, I am no bill-sticker. I am the leading man of Mr. McFudge's Dramatic Company. If you want a treat, come and see my Macbeth next Monday night."

This, then, was the eminent tragedian!!! My heart seemed to rise into my throat and choke my utterance.

When I recovered speech, I told this "king of shreds and patches" that I was the new juvenile man.

"Malcolm, my boy," exclaimed the old toper, "come in here, this is a noted house for Glenlivet; trust me, I am a judge of the national beverage." Before I had time to object, he dragged me into the public-house, and called for a mutchkin of whiskey, for which I had to pay.

While the tragedian was discussing the flavour of his whiskey, McFudge appeared. He was evidently looking for his leading man. He came straight to the bar where we were standing, and saluted the eminent gentleman in anything but a respectful manner. "So you're here, Burke, guzzling as usual, instead of delivering the bills; I suppose you're making your own benefit, eh?" growled McFudge.

"Permit me to introduce our new juvenile gentleman, the future king of Scotland. Malcolm, Mr. McFudge, the worthy manager of the Theatre Royal, Tullibody, renowned for his great impersonation of the Dougal creature. Ah! my boy, you should see him play the Dougal to my Rob Roy; we knock lumps out of them in these parts, don't we, Mac?"

To knock lumps, in theatrical parlance, is to bring down the house; or, in plain English, to elicit the applause of a delighted audience.

McFudge offered me his dirty hand, and muttered something about a long journey, slow trains, and refreshments, at the same time casting a wistful glance at the tragedian's empty glass. I took the hint, and ordered a second supply, which soon disappeared. As it was getting late, I suggested the advisability of going in

search of lodgings. McFudge offered to accompany me to several cottages where professionals generally lodged. After pushing the leading man out of the public-house, and warning him not to use his bills for waste-paper, this model manager led me through the town. I must confess that, although stage-struck, and mad to get a chance of airing my vanity before the public, I felt ashamed to be seen in McFudge's company. He was not badly clothed, but there was a Jeremy Diddler style about him that made me long to have an opportunity of looking for lodgings without his assistance. Without knocking at the cottage doors, McFudge boldly entered, threw himself into the best chair he could find, chucked the girls under their chins, made rude remarks which brought the colour to their cheeks, inquired after their sweethearts, and asked so many impertinent questions that I was fairly ashamed of him. At each place this prelude was performed before McFudge explained the object of our visit. We met with no success; on the contrary, we had to listen to long stories of swindlers who had boarded and lodged at these cottages, and left without paying a cent. One gaunt old woman, with high cheek-bones, showed us an old tin box which had been left with her in lieu of two weeks' board and ten shillings she had lent the owner, to enable him to get to another town, where he said he had a good engagement. Six months after his departure, hearing nothing from the ungrateful fellow, the old woman opened the box, and found nothing but two large stones rolled up in newspapers. McFudge appeared to be very indignant, and declared that he would never have come

to Tullibody, had he known how the poor people had been served by the rogues, who were not *real* professionals. The Tullibodians would now learn the difference between the spurious and the genuine article. His indignation, though well feigned, had no effect upon the old Scotchwoman, and I began to despair of getting a bed that night. We next tried the one hotel and the few beer-shops scattered about the place, but the landlords shook their heads, and made excuses about their regular customers, or the scarcity of accommodation for their own families.

McFudge, who had several refreshers at my expense, now began to get tired of me.

"This licks me," he exclaimed; "I s'pose the members of my company have taken all the lodgings in the town. I'm afraid we shan't find you a doss to-night,—you'll have to do an agricultural."

"What is that?" I inquired.

"Why, turn into some barn, and doss on the straw," said McFudge.

Before I had time to express my indignation at his proposal, a little fat man, with an enormous black moustache, clad in a seedy tweed suit, advanced towards us, wiping his mouth with the remains of a blue silk handkerchief. "Why, Fudgy," he cried, "'tis near the witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn,' and all the pubs are closed. What are you doing so far away from the old woman?"

"I'm glad I've met you, Mac." Another Mac! "Here's Mr. Silvester, the new member of our company, from Irwell. I've been lodging-hunting for him all the

evening. I'll now hand him over to your care. Good-night, friends. A kind good-night to all." Without waiting to hear the remonstrance that Macdonald was about to make, he turned on his heel, and was instantly out of sight.

"Well!" exclaimed my new companion, "Fudgy's a treat. That takes the wind out of my sails. He knows well enough that I can't find a lodging for you at this time o' night; and I suppose you don't care to do an agricultural."

"No," I replied, "if by an agricultural you mean sleeping in a barn."

"Exactly," said Sandy Macdonald, who, in spite of his Scottish name, talked more like a native of Whitechapel than one of Scotia's sons. "Then, what the deuce are you to do?"

"Oh, walk the streets, I suppose," I muttered, despairingly.

"No, that you shan't, laddie; you shan't pad the hoof unless you have a chum, and that's Sandy Macdonald. You shall turn in with me and young Gregory, the low comedy merchant. He shall sleep with me, and you shall have his bed."

I thanked him from the bottom of my heart, for I felt that I had met with a friend at last.

"What do you sell, laddie?"

"Sell!" I exclaimed, wonderingly.

"Yes," he continued. "Is it second low com., util., juves., or second heavies?"

I was obliged to confess my ignorance of the meaning of his technicalities.

"You are a green 'un," he said. "What's your line of biz? What do you play?"

"Oh, now I understand you," I replied. "I am engaged to play the juvenile parts."

"So you're the fish that nibbled at McFudge's bait! Well, I'm sorry for you, laddie."

"Why?" I inquired.

"You'll know soon enough. Hush! don't speak for a few minutes; this is our mansion. If we wake up the old geezers, we shall get notice to quit without compensation."

We had stopped at the door of a shanty outside the town; the front was whitewashed, and the height of the cabin was not more than ten feet. Sandy gently lifted the latch, and we entered. The house was divided into two apartments, called in Scotland "a but and a ben." In the right-hand division lay the two old geezers, as Sandy styled the landlord and his wife. In the centre of the left-hand compartment of this ramshackle dwelling sat a sickly-looking, shabbily-dressed young man, studying his part from a well-thumbed play-book, by the aid of about an inch of a tallow dip. There was hardly room to swing the proverbial cat, for the but, ben, or whatever it was called by the natives, was overcrowded with uncomfortable-looking furniture. On the top of an enormous chest of drawers sat two hideous china dogs, with huge black chains round their necks, guarding between them the library, which comprised a Gaelic Bible, "The Scottish Chiefs," "Blair's Sermons," "The Life of Calvin," and two volumes of "The Penny Magazine." In the wall facing the window were two whitewashed excavations,

about three feet from the ground, resembling very closely the bunks of a ship. These were the beds ! ! !

The air of this den was almost suffocating, and the odour sickening. It was something like a mixture of stale onions, mice, and dirty linen. Sanitary arrangements there were none; and, although I was shocked and disgusted at this discovery on my first visit to Scotland, I soon got used to the barbarous customs of the people in the small towns, whose ignorance of the laws of common decency relating to sanitary matters outrivalled the inhabitants of the dirtiest continental city.

The pale-faced young man, whom Sandy introduced as Mr. Gregory, the low comedian, greeted me with a sickly smile. I thought he looked hungry, and offered him a share of a pork pie I had bought at a railway-station on my road to Tullibody.

I was surprised to hear him say that he had had a good supper. Sandy, observing my confusion, whispered: "We are all right here; the old geezers have never been done before, we are the first 'pros' they have had. You'll see in the morning, I'll order a breakfast fit for a king."

"Poor devils!" sighed Gregory.

"There you go again," said Sandy, in an angry tone. "If we don't do the old geezers, some one else will."

"But you surely mean to pay?" I interposed.

"Oh, yes, we mean to pay, *if it comes in;* but if we only share a bob or two apiece at the end of the week, what then?" said Sandy. "We should want *that* for beer, eh, Greg?"

Gregory glanced at me, and did not reply; he seemed ashamed to acquiesce.

"Now, who'd think Greg was a low-comedy merchant? I say, old boy, we had better change lines,—you shall play the heavies, and I will do the low com."

I looked at Gregory, who only smiled.

Sandy continued, apologetically turning to me, "He's funny enough on the stage, but off the boards he's about as comical as a mute."

"I vote that we turn in," yawned Gregory. "I've been studying the third witch; McFudge has asked me to double the first and third witches. What are you going to play, Mr. Silvester?"

"I am engaged for Malcolm," I replied.

"And the rest," said Sandy, as he began to undress. "You don't suppose that McFudge will let you off with Malcolm? What do you think I've got to do? I play the overture on the bosh at the side, then I appear as the noble Banquo, and the first murderer."

"But," I interrupted, "how can you play Banquo and the first murderer; they are both on the stage at the same time?"

"Not as we do it,—we cut Banquo's entrance in the front scene. Disguised with a black cloak, a pair of whiskers, and a big felt hat, I come on as the first murderer. I run the speeches of the two murderers into one, look off, and yell out in another voice, 'It will rain to-night.' I then back a step or two, let the audience see my dagger, and exit with 'Let it come down.'"

"But how do you manage in the banquet scene?" I

inquired, for I was proud to let these old stagers know that I was pretty well acquainted with Shakespeare.

"Oh, that's easy enough ; the ghost and the murderer are not on together; I have a quick change, that's all."

" Then you have finished ? " I ventured.

" Devil a bit, laddie. Haven't I the music to look after? That isn't all; you will meet me as Rosse, in the fourth act, and you may recognise me as the doctor in the fifth."

By this time the candle had burnt out; we had no need of a light, however, for the moon was at the full, and the sky was cloudless. By the aid of a chair I mounted my bunk. There was scarcely room for me to turn from one side to the other. How fat Sandy and the low comedian managed to squeeze into their cavity was as great a puzzle to me then as it is now. Although I was fatigued after my long journey and the lodging-hunting expedition, I could not sleep. My two companions were very inquisitive. They asked me many questions about my home, and they wanted to know how much money I had got, and whether I had any intention of going into management. Sandy was very communicative; he told us his whole history. He was originally a fiddler at a penny gaff, in the East-end of London. Then he became the manager of a penny dookey, as a gaff used to be called in those days. At first he was rather successful, but when a rival establishment was opened not a hundred yards from the site of Sandy's temple, he lost the greater portion of his regular patrons. Two, and sometimes three, performances a night were given at these gaffs. The prices

of admission ranged from one penny to threepence, in the palmy days of the drama, as Sandy styled the successful period of his managerial career; but when there were two Richmonds in the field, the prices dropped to one penny admission to any part of the house. The rival gaff was showily decorated, and boasted a better roof than Sandy's establishment, where the audience were sometimes treated to a shower-bath on wet nights. Business got worse and worse, and Sandy had exhausted nearly all his resources, when he hit upon a scheme for drawing away the Whitechapel and Limehouse boys from the rival show. He had an acquaintance, a ginger-beer merchant in a small way of business, who offered to buy all the empty stone bottles that Sandy could lay hold of. It was in the dog-days, the season dreaded by theatrical managers, when the most extraordinary poster ever conceived by a public caterer was posted in front of the Royal Palace of Varieties.

TO-NIGHT, AT 7 AND 9.

TWO GRAND BALLETS!!!

AND THE EXCITING DRAMA OF

THE BLUE DWARF;

Or, Mystery, Love, and Crime.

THREE BROADSWORD COMBATS.

Concluding with the Wonderful Feats of Mons. Flook, the Great French Clown.

Admission, Front Seats, One Halfpenny;

Back Seats, Two GINGER-BEER BOTTLES!!!

This attractive poster, which was painted by the man

who combined every line of business with property-making and scene-daubing, had the desired effect.

The money-taker's box was not big enough to hold the stacks of ginger-beer bottles, which were carted away every morning by the manufacturer. "The manager and his myrmidons" of the rival gaff, as Sandy styled them, turned amateur detectives in the day-time, and warned the police that wholesale robberies of ginger-beer bottles were being perpetrated in the neighbourhood of Sandy's show.

Ragged urchins, who were sent by their mothers to the chandlers' shops for loaves of bread, pennyworths of sugar, or half-ounces of tea, contrived to help themselves to the empty stone bottles whenever they happened to be within reach. One night, in consequence of these investigations, Sandy received a visit from the district inspector of police, and his ingenuity was again severely taxed. He was a bit of a philosopher, and reasoned thus: "Boys are always hungry; if I could only give them food for the body as well as for the mind, I'd turn this show into a little gold mine." "Gold mine" is a favourite expression of unsuccessful theatrical managers.

After much thought, he hit upon a scheme which again threatened to turn the tide of fortune in his favour. One Saturday evening, not long after the ginger-beer bottle trade came to an end, another startling poster appeared at the door of Sandy's theatre:

ADMISSION, ONE PENNY,
INCLUDING REFRESHMENTS!

The rival manager and his company, when they read this announcement, declared that it must either be a

rank swindle, or the work of a lunatic; and they suffered agonies of suspense before they learned the truth.

Half an hour before the door was opened, a large crowd of roughs congregated in front of the old gaff. The new show was deserted, and the manager in a state of frenzy. When the door gave way,—it did not need opening, the crush was so great,—Sandy was discovered seated in the money-box with several huge sacks of carrots at his side; each boy or girl who paid for admission was presented with a fine carrot.

No checks were needed, for Sandy, who had an eye to economy, said that the carrot would serve as a check, as well as a nice light refreshment. The effect of a money-taker at a place of amusement serving out carrots to the audience was so ludicrous, that even the lowest of the gaff patrons took it all in good part, and many of the hungry urchins from the slums of Poplar, Limehouse, and Whitechapel, began munching their carrots before they passed the check-taker. Of course, there was any amount of chaff about the refreshments. "Give us a plate, Sandy," shouted one rough. "Scrape it for us," cried another. "S'pose you'll give us turnups next time?" screamed an East-end lady, who earned her living by step-cleaning. A young coster suggested "Inguns," but Sandy was chaff-proof; fortune seemed to smile upon him once more.

Every morning he went to Covent-garden Market with a friendly coster, where he bought his refreshments for the evening's performances. His rival was beaten out of the field. It was useless to complain to the police; Sandy paid for the carrots, and no law could

prevent him presenting them to his patrons. The new manager was too legitimate to do likewise, therefore ruin stared him in the face. In less than a fortnight, Sandy's evil star was again in the ascendant. The refreshment novelty began to wane; the boys, instead of eating their carrots, threw them on the stage at the performers, and one Saturday night the carrot-season came to an abrupt termination. The drama was "Susan Hopley." In one scene the low comedian has a deal to say about a friend of his, called Spriggins. This delightful play was one of Sandy's stock pieces; he generally produced it on Saturday nights, followed by "Sweeney Todd, the Barber-Murderer of Fleet-street,"—abridged versions, of course. On this occasion, Sandy was particularly struck with the unusually good behaviour of the boys; the stage was free from carrots, there was no whistling, and very little applause. Sandy felt uneasy. "This order means no good," he observed to his check-taker. "What's up? The house is as quiet as a West-end theatre. I'll have a look round." Sandy walked about the auditorium as well as he could, for the gaff was densely packed. Perfect order reigned, but it was only the calm that precedes a violent storm. The old-fashioned drama went smoothly enough, and the front scene between the low comedian and the chambermaid commenced. Sandy noticed that several roughs were smiling and whispering to each other, and, what appeared stranger still, not a carrot had been eaten. The comic man raised the curiosity of the chambermaid to its highest pitch: she wanted to see the mysterious Spriggins. Her wish was gratified by her sweetheart, who went off at the righ

wing and led on a live donkey, exclaiming, "This is Spriggins."

The audience at this critical moment rose *en masse*, and with one voice gave a mighty "Hee, haw!" Then followed a shower of carrots. They were all aimed at the donkey, but the low comedian and chambermaid were caught in the vegetable storm. They rushed frantically off the stage. The "Hee, haw!" chorus was resumed. The coster who had lent the donkey was in front. He jumped upon a seat, and roared: "Take off the moke! take off the moke!" The moke, who had recovered from his fright, began to munch the carrots which heaped the stage. The musicians, three in number,—violin, cornet, and double-bass,—bolted from the orchestra the moment they felt the effects of the stray carrots. As no one attempted to lead off the donkey, the owner of the animal leaped upon the stage and seized the bridle. The donkey refused to leave his splendid banquet. The coster pulled with all his might, the donkey stretched his neck and back towards the footlights, the roughs yelled like savages, the coster swore like a trooper. The character of the entertainment had entirely changed; it was now a trial of strength between a man and a donkey. The forces were in a state of equilibrium; the boys saw in it their old game of the tug of war, and vociferously applauded. Another moment, and the donkey backed an inch or two nearer the footlights. Loud cheers, and cries of "Bravo, moke! Two to one on the cuckoo!" The coster's strength was evidently giving way. Stung with the derisive taunts of the roughs, he pulled himself together by a supreme effort; the ass was moved nearly a foot

from the floats; the man seemed to be gaining and the donkey losing strength, when the coster stepped upon a slippery carrot and fell on his back, letting the bridle escape from his grasp; the donkey, obeying a well-known physical law, tumbled into the orchestra, his hind-legs going through the body of the bass fiddle. The scene now baffled description. In his struggles to get free the donkey kicked the double-bass to smithereens. Roughs jumped upon the stage, the gas was turned off, benches were uprooted, and, before the police arrived, the Royal Theatre of Varieties was a wreck, and Sandy Macdonald a ruined man. Thus ended Sandy's "strange, eventful history."

It was five o'clock before I fell asleep in my bunk. At half-past eight Sandy woke me up, and told me to get ready for breakfast.

In the middle of the room, on a small round table, I found a tin bowl containing about a pint of water, a morsel of mottled soap, a small towel with scarcely a dry patch upon it, a dirty comb that originally cost one penny, and an old brush almost destitute of bristles. With such a splendid set of toilet accessories I did my best to improve my personal appearance. Gregory opened the window, and emptied the bowl. Sandy wiped the table with the wet towel, and tried to transform the apartment from a bed-chamber to a breakfast-room. When he considered the transformation complete, he said to Gregory:

"Now, Greg, old man, it is your turn to order the breakfast. I did it yesterday morning, you know."

"Well, you've got more cheek than I have. I don't

like ordering things I know we shall never pay for," replied Gregory.

"But you like eating them, don't you?" retorted Sandy. "Well, I suppose I must do the deed. Hi, grandmother! What ho, within there!"

An old woman, barefooted, and her head covered with a white nightcap, entered the room, and waited for orders. Sandy apologised for my presence, and said that he would make it "all right" when he paid the bill. He ordered six eggs, a pound of fried bacon, and a pot of coffee, remarking to me, as the old lady left the room to prepare the breakfast, that we might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I told Sandy that I would pay my share; but this strange creature pooh-poohed the idea. He said the Macdonalds had always been noted for their hospitality. I was his guest, and he would never know peace again if he accepted payment for a bed and a meal.

Sandy's show of virtuous indignation did not blind me to the fact that I was joining in a conspiracy to defraud two old people, who had probably worked hard all their days to get an honest living. I had a few pounds in my pocket, and I secretly determined to pay liberally for my bed and breakfast before I left the house. This resolve enabled me to eat and drink without suffering any qualms of conscience. I cannot say that the meal was tempting. The Scottish poor are the worst cooks in the civilised world. They can make porridge, haggis, and broth; but how to boil potatoes, make pastry, or prepare what we term in England a plain dinner, they have not the ghost of an idea. Nor is this ignorance of the culinary art

peculiar to the Highland cottager. I have since paid as much as three guineas a week for private lodgings in the Scottish capital, where I have been unable to get a dinner decently cooked. Actors and actresses who visit the land of Burns know too well the effect of Scotch cooking upon their digestive organs. When breakfast was over we repaired to the temporary theatre, which was known to the Tullibodians as the Oddfellows' Hall. Externally, the building resembled a small national school. Internally, it only wanted a pulpit to make it a perfect little chapel. Instead of the parson's rostrum, a temporary stage had been erected, and at the moment we entered McFudge was mounted on a ladder, in the act of fixing one of the proscenium wings.

I had never before seen a "fit-up," but I had often been to a marionette show that used to visit Irwell fair, and I could not help noting a striking resemblance between McFudge's theatre and the old *fantoccini*, where I had seen performances by wooden artistes far superior to many of the exhibitions it was my misfortune to be connected with in after-years. The rehearsal of "Macbeth" had been called for ten o'clock, but there were no signs of a beginning at thirty minutes past that hour.

Some of the players had assembled in the hall. One stout, middle-aged female, who passed as Mrs. McFudge, was endeavouring to hide the legs of the tressels on which the stage rested with a long piece of pink glazed lining, which, I afterwards learned, occasionally served as the skirt of a burlesque dress. Another female, who was decked out in faded finery, was looking over her scanty wardrobe to find a suitable costume for the

gentlewoman in "Macbeth." The scenery consisted of four cloths and one set-piece, which did duty as a cottage, an inn, a palace, or a prison. It had been so well stained with travelling, that Beverley himself would have been puzzled to define the edifice it was intended to represent. Upon the cloths, or drop-scenes, were painted a wood, a street, and two interiors. One chamber was used as act-drop and curtain, which reduced the number of available scenes to three. Burke, the leading-man, had not turned up, and when I asked after him, Sandy told me that he last saw him dreadfully "palatic" (drunk), assisted by his wife and daughter, who were helping him home at eleven o'clock the previous night.

My two companions lit their pipes, and begged me to take it easy; the rehearsal could not begin until Burke had slept off the effects of the drink. Here the reader may not unnaturally wonder why I did not return home, and leave the low set I had joined.

There were two very strong reasons why I determined to lie upon the bed I had made. I was too proud to act the prodigal son, and the prospect of making a start in the dramatic profession was too fascinating to a stage-struck youth, who might not, if he returned home, meet with another chance. Besides, I hoped to leave McFudge, and get an engagement at a decent provincial theatre, so soon as I had had a little experience in the "smalls." While we were waiting for the leading man, Sandy gave me the history of the company. Burke, he said, had once held a good position on the provincial stage; but since he had

become a confirmed drunkard there was not a decent theatre in the kingdom or a penny gaff in London open to him. He was a remarkably versatile actor; when sober, he could play tragedy or comedy parts. His Irish and Scotch impersonations were admirable, and he was equally good in pantomime. For several years he had been a slave to drink, the effects of which had brutalised his nature. He had one very pretty daughter, who displayed rare dramatic talent, although she could neither read nor write. Whenever she had a new part to study, her mother used to read it over a few times, and she was often letter-perfect at the first rehearsal. Burke never showed the slightest affection for his clever daughter; he usually terminated a drunken bout by taking off his leather belt and thrashing the girl until she screamed for help. Frequently she came to rehearsal with a black eye, the effect of her father's cruelty. At the age of eighteen, Miss Burke made her escape to London, where she obtained an engagement in the ballet at a West-end music-hall.

There she was singled out by an old *roué*, who furnished a house for her in St. John's Wood; and six months later she might have been seen any night promenading Regent-street and the Haymarket. Gregory asked me what I thought of Mrs. McFudge. I replied, that she was a nice, respectable-looking woman. Sandy winked, and informed me that she was the fifth Mrs. McFudge to his knowledge.

The present manageress had a very pretty daughter, who was stage-struck. The girl's father unfortunately died, leaving his wife but a small income. The mother,

who was a slave to her daughter's whims and fancies, advertised in the *Epoch* for a gentleman to give her daughter lessons in acting. Out of many replies, she accepted the offer of a manager who was playing in the small towns of Cumberland and Westmoreland. This was no other than McFudge, who promised all kinds of impossibilities, including the girl's success as a leading actress, after a few months' practice on his circuit. The mother and daughter first met McFudge at a little seaport town in Cumberland.

It was soon proved that the girl had no talent; but McFudge did not intend to speak the truth. He had his eye on the daughter, with whose pretty face he was much pleased. At the same time, he did not care to offend the old lady, in case his treasury failed him. He flattered both these silly women, squared the local reporter, who wrote gushing notices in the *Haven Gazette*, and asked the critic who reported the amusements for the *Epoch* to describe the girl as the coming actress of the age. One night, over a confidential glass, McFudge revealed his plans to Sandy Macdonald. He was going to propose to the old woman, and make her Mrs. McFudge number five. It was to be all fair and square and above-board; nothing was to be dispensed with save the troublesome little ceremony in the kirk. It was a great sacrifice to make, when there were so many fresh young girls who would consent to anything in order to get a footing on the stage, but he had resolved to consider his company before himself. They would benefit by the widow's money when business was at a low ebb. This piece of villainy had yet to be eclipsed. After the glasses were refilled,

McFudge became still more communicative. When the old woman's money had gone, he declared his intention of leaving her in the lurch, and asking the daughter to fill the mother's place. The bait was to be leading business, and a share in the management of the theatres in his circuit. So far, Sandy assured me that McFudge had kept his word. The widow's capital was nearly exhausted, and she was beginning to put the curb on; she had refused to advance the money to bring the company from the last town, and they had been compelled to pawn their luggage with the railway company in consequence. McFudge here interrupted this story of immorality and depravity by asking Sandy to try the witches' music. As he passed the girl who was to play the gentlewoman in "Macbeth," our musical heavy man put his arm around her waist, and behaved in such a familiar manner that I asked Gregory if they were related to each other. The comedian laughed, and told me that she only joined McFudge's company a fortnight ago. She had formerly been engaged as a ballet girl at one of the Glasgow theatres. Sandy was smitten, and intended to ask her to live with him.

"Then he doesn't intend to marry her?"

"How can he, when he has a wife and two children living?" was the answer.

The night after that conversation the girl occupied the same cavity in which I had spent the night at Sandy's lodgings!!

Burke arrived an hour and a quarter late; his eyes were bloodshot and his hands were shaky. The

rehearsal commenced, but I could not follow it. A number of the characters were cut out altogether. I asked McFudge who played the porter, young Siward, old Siward, and Lady Macduff; the questions made the manager roar with laughter. The rehearsal was stopped, to allow McFudge to ask the prompter who was cast for Lady Macduff. The whole company shouted themselves hoarse at my expense.

I knew nothing about the acting-editions of Shakespeare. I had never heard of either Lacey's or Cumberland's play-books. I had studied my parts from my own presentation copy, and I was astonished when I found how much I had to *unlearn*. The rehearsal came to an end, and then the treasury was opened. There was really nothing to share, but Mrs. McFudge, after a long dispute with the manager, consented to advance half-a-crown to each member of the company. Burke was so indignant when he was paid his share that he threatened to resign without notice. McFudge only laughed at his threat, and asked him ironically if he had signed an engagement to open at Drury-lane. Ultimately, the hall was cleared, and the whole company adjourned to a public-house, where they discussed their grievances until they had spent more than half their weekly earnings in beer and whiskey. Sandy, who had saved me from the noted sponger and tippler Burke, now told me that a young lady would occupy my bed that and every other evening during the season at Tullibody; therefore, the best thing I could do was to look for lodgings before it was too late. I took the hint, and on the spot offered the landlord of the Stirling

Castle, where we had assembled, a week's rent in advance for the use of a bedroom. Although he had refused me the previous day, the canny Scot could not find it in his heart to turn away good siller, and I was glad to get lodgings where I might be alone. Already I had seen enough of these Bohemians, whose code of morals was evidently based on a very primitive formula. Left to my own reflections, I became intensely miserable. A Scotch Sabbath, too, is not conducive to cheerfulness. The day is generally spent in going to kirk and drinking whiskey. Although the public-houses in Scotland are supposed to be closed from Saturday night until Monday morning, a large quantity of drink is sold every Sunday to persons who come in from the neighbouring towns and villages. At the present time there are certain Sunday trains, on the Glasgow and South-Western Railway, that run between Glasgow and Paisley, called *Drunkards' Trains.*

Hundreds of men and women, who do not lay in a stock of alcohol on the Saturday night, pay the return fare between Glasgow and Paisley, on the Sabbath-day, on purpose to satisfy their inordinate craving for their smoky fire-water.

I have lodged in Scotch towns where my landlady has forbidden me to play sacred music on the piano, and thought it a sin to cook my dinner on the Sabbath-day, but she deemed it no harm to go to kirk in the morning and get helplessly drunk in the afternoon. Commend me to the Scotch for wholesale gnat-straining and camel-swallowing.

Monday morning came at last. We had another

"fluffy rehearsal," as Sandy called it. Every time Macbeth was wanted a messenger had to be despatched to the nearest public-house, where Burke was sure to be found drinking at some one else's expense. The shabby dresses were looked out, and put in their places ready for the night. Sandy informed me that McFudge did not possess a rag of his own. The wardrobe belonged to an old lady who lived in the neighbourhood of Bow-street, London, who made a living by letting out theatrical costumes to country managers. McFudge, about twelve months ago, had hired a wardrobe for thirty shillings per week; but he had never paid a penny to the poor old lady, who had lost his whereabouts, for McFudge was careful enough to keep his own name out of the *Epoch*.

At the end of the costumier's advertisement in the theatrical organ the line "*Will Mr. McFudge please communicate?*" was invariably to be found. Mr. McFudge did not please to communicate, and as the intrinsic value of the dresses would not equal the cost of a journey from London to Tullibody and back, it is not likely that the old lady would have gone in search of her wardrobe, even if she had traced the renowned swindler to his wretched show in the Highlands.

The performance of "Macbeth" was announced for eight o'clock. I entered the dressing-room at six o'clock, and made up as well as I could before the others arrived. Miss Florence Somerskill, the widow's daughter, and McFudge's next victim, who was cast for Lady Macbeth, was the next to appear.

This young girl was the last person in the world who

ought to have attempted the leading *rôle* in a Shakespearian tragedy.

She had a pretty baby-face, that might have suited such a character as Dora, in "David Copperfield." She was quite destitute of dramatic talent, and could not even speak correctly. The rest of the characters strolled in as the time for ringing up the curtain drew near; and the orchestra behind the scenes, consisting of Sandy's violin and an old piano dreadfully out of tune, played by Miss Somerskill, began to scrape and thump preparatory to starting the overture. There was, however, no occasion for Sandy to ask Miss Somerskill to sound her A. Gregory made up for the first witch, and looking more like a dirty old rag-picker than one of the weird sisters, peeped through the hole in the scene that served for an act-drop, and informed us that there was not a soul in front. This was at five minutes to eight. Sandy postponed the overture, put on an old top-coat over his Banquo dress, and went in front to speak to McFudge, who was to be the Macduff of the evening. When he reached the door he found Mrs. McFudge seated at a small wooden table, with a bowl in front of her and half-a-crown's worth of change, vainly waiting to relieve the Tullibodians of their sixpences and shillings. McFudge was standing outside, speculating upon the passers-by, muttering curses not loud but deep, as they went on their way, scarcely deigning to glance at the theatre-bills. At a quarter past eight, Sandy returned to the stage, looking extremely wretched. He said that we should not play to much, that was certain, and what we did take would be seized by the station-master, who had

sent a porter to collect the amount due to the railway company. Just as Sandy had finished his mournful speech, we were startled by hearing the tramp of people entering the hall. A rush was made to the peep-hole. Gregory cried, "Here they come at last," in a cheerful voice; but immediately after he continued, in a solemn tone, "It's only the basket-maker and his wife. They had orders given to them for lending us the three sticks for the witches!"

The thought of having to play the tragedy of "Macbeth" to a couple of dead-heads was anything but cheering, even to the people who were used to summer business in Scotland. My ardour was completely damped for the time being. I began to feel that no matter how much talent I might possess, Tullibody was not on the road to fame. The basket-maker got tired of waiting, and showed his impatience by stamping his feet and shouting "Up wi' the curtain." The town clock chimed three-quarters, and Mr. and Mrs. McFudge announced their intention of dismissing the audience, and postponing the play until the next evening. The basket-maker and his wife cut up rough; they were out for a holiday, and they did not see why they should be swindled. They did not exactly ask for their money to be returned, but they refused to budge without their sticks, and left threatening to advertise us in the town as "a pack o' play-acting cheats."

There was no alternative but to return to the dressing-room, and doff our moth-eaten velvet and tarnished-gold dresses. At a quarter past nine we left the hall, McFudge and his company consoling themselves with

the usual stereotyped excuses. The weather was too hot. Who could sit out a tragedy in the dog-days? It was too soon after the circus that had lately visited the town. All the money was spent. The bills had not been out long enough. The inhabitants were keeping back for the Provost's bespeak on Friday night. No! they had all gone to the Town Hall, where a troupe of Christy Minstrels were performing. "Then we'll go there, too," exclaimed Sandy, a proposition which was carried unanimously. As we entered the concert-room of the Town Hall the niggers greeted us with friendly nods, and seemed pleased with the addition to their audience. There were not more than a dozen or fifteen people who had paid for admission, so we had very little cause to feel envious.

The burnt-cork artistes brought their performance to a speedy termination, and joined our company at the Stirling Castle, where they related their failures and successes until the closing-hour arrived. When I retired to my room, feeling heartsick, I counted up my money, and found that I had spent £2 in four days, the greater portion of which had gone down the throats of McFudge's company. At that rate my little capital would be exhausted in about six weeks, and then I should be reduced to the level of my companions. While I had a few pounds in my pocket I could leave this wretched town, and seek my fortune in one of the big cities. If I stepped from my pedestal and went on the stage of a good theatre as a utility man,—aye, even as a super,—could I not work my way up to a position as I had heard others had done? Surely I had met with

only the dregs of the profession. Here was my first introduction to the stage. What had I found? A pack of drunkards and harlots, who lived by swindling.

These were the so-called representatives of dramatic art, recruited from the lowest types of humanity. These the people who were permitted to portray the noble characters of our immortal poet. No wonder that bad business was the rule. The very name of play-actor seemed to be here a term of reproach; and people who valued their reputations shunned them as if they were bringing plague and pestilence into the town. Thank God that I had sufficient courage to sink my dignity, and escape before it was too late.

Early the next morning I paid my bill and bade adieu to Tullibody. While McFudge and his company were sleeping off the effects of the Scotch whiskey they had poured down their thirsty throats the previous night, I was on my way to one of the big commercial centres of Scotland, there to search for my ideal actors and actresses. Whether I found them as my fancy painted them the reader will learn in good time, if he has the patience to follow me to the end of this series of pictures of the modern stage.

CHAPTER II.

STAGE TRAPS AND PITFALLS.

The Edina Theatre—A Strong-minded Manageress—"Rob Roy"—Accommodation Behind the Scenes—The Green-room—An Invitation to a Theatrical Supper—I find Myself in a Shebeen for the First Time—Willans, the Scotch Comedian—"Pat Molloy."—My Escape from the Shebeen—Reflections—Is Life Worth Living?—I play My First Part—Stage Properties—Actresses' Wardrobes—Farewell to Edina—I open at Coaltown—A Popular Star—A Theatrical Don Juan—Supper at the Hotel—Funny (?) Stories—Seduction, Desertion, and Suicide—Suicide of an Actor's Victims—An Actress's Temptations—Drunkenness in the Profession—Anecdotes of Drunken Actors—The Indian in the Wrong Play—Sir Roger on 'Change—The Modern School of Actors.

I ARRIVED at the romantic city of Edina at seven o'clock in the evening. How beautiful its streets and noble buildings appeared after the rough roads and hideous structures of the Highland town I had just quitted!

I engaged a room at a second-rate hotel, and, after a hasty meal, I went in search of the theatre. With a palpitating heart I entered the vestibule, and inquired for the manager. The box money-taker informed me that the manager was in London, but if I wished I could see the manageress, Mrs. Winter, who transacted every kind of business relating to the theatre in her husband's absence. At my earnest request the lady was

sent for. The messenger returned with Mrs. Winter, a tall, middle-aged woman, with a remarkably shrewd expression. At first sight, she struck me as a person who was capable of holding her own under any circumstances; and I was not mistaken, for I afterwards learned that Mr. Winter had to take a back seat when his wife was about.

This self-possessed lady, as she advanced towards me, looked me full in the face, and asked my business. I did not like to tell my story before the money and check-taker, so I begged the favour of a private interview, which was readily granted. I followed Mrs. Winter to the treasury, at the back of the theatre, and there I told her, as briefly as I could, my adventures at Tullibody, and my desire to accept a subordinate position in a good theatre. Mrs. Winter was interested in my story; but she gave me very little encouragement. She told me that the path to dramatic fame was strewn with thorns; she had no vacancy in her company, but if I liked to go on as a supernumerary during the run of the present production, "Rob Roy," she would endeavour to find me a little part in the next piece, which would be played in a week's time. I was to commence at a salary of ten shillings per week, to be increased to a guinea when I proved myself capable of playing utility parts. I eagerly accepted the engagement, and sincerely thanked Mrs. Winter for her kindness. The lady cut short my expressions of gratitude, and left me to watch the play behind the scenes.

"Rob Roy" was well mounted; the actors and actresses were all correctly dressed, and the choruses

were efficiently rendered. I felt that I was in a good theatre at last, although the accommodation behind the scenes did not come up to my expectation. The dressing-rooms were not comfortable, and the green-room, about which I had read so much in books,—written by authors who had never been behind the scenes in their lives,—was used as a "stars'" dressing-room, and at present occupied by the gentleman who played Rob Roy, the finest exponent of that character I have ever seen. The members of the company had no room in which they could assemble during the "waits"; they had either to return to their dressing-rooms or loiter in the wings. While I was intently watching the action of the drama, a pretty girl, attired as a Scotch peasant, tapped me on the shoulder, and inquired after my health. I replied that I was quite well, and hoped that she was the same.

"Never better," said my fair questioner. "Are you thirsty, old boy?"

"Not at all," I replied. "Are you?"

"Dreadfully! I had o'er muckle last night, and I've a great thirst on me."

"Is there no water to be had?" I inquired.

"Water!" she exclaimed, with a disdainful expression on her pretty face. "Do you drink water?"

"Certainly I do sometimes."

"So do I, dear, when there's a wee drap of whiskey in it."

This was said in a winning manner, and without a tinge of boldness.

There was an awkward pause. The girl looked

bashfully upon the ground for a few seconds. Then, with a sweet smile, and sidling up to me again:

"Aren't you going to send for a nip, dear, before I go on?"

"Certainly, if you can find anybody to fetch it."

Without waiting to reply, she bounded off in the direction of the property-room, where the stage accessories are made and stored. In less than a minute she returned with a dirty young urchin, known as Rab, the property-man's boy, who held in his hand a half-pint spirit-bottle. I gave the lad a shilling, and off he darted through the stage-door into the street. Five minutes had hardly elapsed before Rab returned with the whiskey. My pretty acquaintance did not trouble about a glass. Eagerly she pulled out the cork, raised the bottle to her thickly-painted lips, and took a long swig of the fiery liquid. When I refused to follow her example she laughed, and remarked that there would be all the more for her.

"Are you a friend of Mrs. Winter?" she asked.

"No, I am coming here to act."

"Are you? Oh, how nice. Where are you going to-night, after the piece is over?"

"To my lodgings."

"Where are you stopping?" inquired the inquisitive little woman.

"At the Star, until I can get private lodgings."

"I know a nice place that would just suit you."

"Do you?" I replied. "Perhaps you will kindly give me the address?"

"I will take you there myself," said the girl, "after

I have dressed, if you will wait for me at the stage-door."

"Thank you, but won't it be troubling you too much?"

"Not at all. My sister keeps the house, and *I* live there."

Reader, I do not wish to set myself up as a pattern of virtue. If I were to state that I indignantly refused to accept the girl's offer I should be writing a lie, and that would be from the purpose of this book, which is to faithfully represent the stage as it was when I first joined the profession, and as it is at the present time.

I was scarcely twenty years of age, and, although I was not pleased to see a young girl drinking whiskey like water, I am bound to confess that I did not then object to the idea of lodging where the landlady had an attractive sister who was engaged at the theatre where I was to make my *debut*. She might, I thought, give me many useful hints, and save me from committing blunders similar to the error that caused such merriment at Tullibody. If these excuses do not suffice, let me add another reason, the most potent of them all. The girl was young and pretty. I was inexperienced, and knew nothing about the sirens of the stage.

My companion chatted gaily until it was her turn to go on. She did not speak, neither did she take much interest in the scene; her head was constantly turned to where I was standing, and once, when the action of the play brought her close to me, she whispered, "Don't go until I am ready."

The curtain fell upon the Rob Roy family, and there was a general rush to the dressing-rooms.

My young friend stopped to tell me that her sister intended giving a little supper to a few theatrical friends that night, and she would introduce me to two or three members of the company. She again made me promise to wait at the stage-door, and assured me that she would not be long. In a quarter of an hour she joined me, and taking my arm she hurried me along until we reached her sister's house, which was situated in a dismal street that ran parallel with the principal thoroughfare, and not a quarter of a mile from the theatre. We mounted a lot of stone steps before we gained the front door. I was a stranger to the "flat" system, and it appeared like a house within a house. Letting herself in with a latch-key, my companion beckoned me to follow her.

The room we entered was very nicely furnished, but there was the inevitable bed in a recess in the wall. The girl turned up the gas, and I saw that she was not so pretty now that she had washed off the bismuth and carmine which masked her face at the theatre. She looked considerably older, too. Behind the scenes she passed, in my judgment, for sixteen; at home, she appeared to be on the wrong side of twenty. While she was untying her hat, she told me to call her Nannie, and not to be a shy laddie. After she had taken off her jacket and gloves she seized my hat, hung it up outside, and then called in a loud voice, "Flo! Flo! come and see my new friend."

In answer to this summons, a tall, handsome girl,

clad in a scarlet dressing-gown, made her appearance. She held out her hand to me, and Nannie introduced me as the new member of the "Royal" company. A rap at the front door announced the arrival of the guests: two of the actors from the Edina Theatre, and a dissipated-looking youth, who was introduced to me as Doctor Hardy. He was a medical student, studying at the Edina University. One of the actors was named Willans, and the other Keech. Bob Willans, as he was familiarly called, was a great favourite with the play-going public. His reputation chiefly depended upon his impersonation of Scotch characters; and the Dougal Creature was his great part. Whenever "Rob Roy" was produced, Willans was in great request; and managers of other Scotch towns availed themselves of Bob's services whenever it was convenient for Mr. Winter to loan him for the favourite national drama.

I was rather surprised to see Willans embrace Nannie's sister, and I was still more surprised to see the burly actor put his arms round Nannie's neck and give her a hearty salute. This, I thought, was making too free, and hardly to be excused on the score of old acquaintanceship. I had little time for reflection, however, for Nannie and her sister invited us into another apartment, where supper was laid. There was a very decent spread for a Scotch house, but there appeared to be a good many bottles on the sideboard, in addition to a row of imperial pints containing Prestonpans ale. The supper passed off without any striking incident. Willans and Keech talked shop, and the medical student whispered idiotic sentences in Flo's ear. When the

table was cleared, glasses and toddy-ladles were brought out of a cupboard by Willans, who seemed to know the house and its contents as well as the landlady herself. Two bottles were put upon the table; and I noticed a mysterious conversation going on between Keech and the medical student, which ended with the student handing Flora a sovereign. "Surely he cannot be paying for the whiskey," I wondered.

The toddy was ladled out, and Bob Willans proposed a song. The rest of the company, including the two girls, rapped the table with their glasses and shouted: "Pat Molloy! Pat Molloy!" "Yes," cried Nannie, "give us 'Pat Molloy,' Bob." Willans, who did not want much persuasion, stood up and sang "Pat Molloy," a favourite ditty of his, and one which he had often sung at Jemmy Dyce's, the free-and-easy in Queen-street, Edina. At the end of each verse, Keech, Hardy, and the girls shouted in chorus, "My country it is Ireland, and my name is Pat Molloy."

When Willans had finished his song, the glasses were refilled, and, to my amazement, the student seized Nannie and placed her on his knee, and Willans did the same with Flo. I now began to wish myself away. This did not seem the right sort of place for a young actor to lodge at. The girls, as they became heated with the drink, made use of improper language, and I resolved to ask Keech a few questions. At first he laughed at me, put his finger to his nose, and made other pantomimic signs which seemed to imply that I knew all about it. I then told him that Nannie had brought me there to arrange with her sister about lodgings, as I had

only put up at an hotel until I could find a room in a private house to suit me. Seeing that I was in earnest, he told me that I was in a shebeen, a place kept by disreputable women, where drink was sold without a licence. "But," I interrupted, "the young woman who brought me here is one of the actresses at the theatre."

"One of the extras, you mean. Nannie is a regular decoy-duck. She goes on in the ballet because she draws more custom to her sister's house that way than if she spent her evenings in Queen-street."

"Then this is a house of ill-fame," I exclaimed.

"If you prefer to call it by that name I have no objection," said Keech.

"But surely," I urged, "the manager of the theatre would not allow such a character on his stage if he knew the truth?"

"My dear boy, managers of theatres seldom trouble themselves about the morals of their ballet ladies. They would have all their work to do if they only engaged girls whose characters would bear the light of inquiry. Nannie is quite as good as many you will meet in theatres before you have done with the profession. She does not disguise her real calling; many assume a virtue when they have it not. They are the worst, according to my experience. The girls one meets in theatres who profess a lot of mock modesty generally fleece the unsuspecting novices before their victims find them out; but these two girls do appear in their true colours. If you don't like their company, you are at liberty to go where you please in search of better—or worse!"

"Then we are expected to pay for our suppers?" I asked.

"Don't alarm yourself; these two girls never expect much from actors. They are very good to the profession, and they generally invite one or two of us when they have no other guests. That spooney Hardy, who is squandering his father's money instead of studying his books on dry bones and physic, came with us, as you know. Willans and I picked him up at Butterford's bar; so, to save him from worse mischief, we brought him here to pay for our suppers. But you don't drink, your glass is empty; make yourself comfortable, there's many a worse crib than Nannie's in this very street."

"Do make some excuse for me, Mr. Keech; they don't want my company, and I really ought not to be here."

"Do you know the time?" said Keech.

"No, but it must be late," I replied.

"It is half-past two. You can't get in your hotel to-night, unless you kick up a rumpus. You'd better stay where you are. Nannie will make you up a bed on the sofa in the next room. There's no rehearsal to-morrow, so we shall be all right."

What could I do? I was no anchorite. To remain until eight or nine o'clock would make little or no difference, so I consented to stay and keep Keech company until the others thought fit to retire.

The quantity of whiskey that was consumed would have satisfied a family of moderate drinkers for five or six weeks. The medical student was asked in his turn to sing a song, but he excused himself on the ground

that he had to preserve his voice for Saturday night, when he intended to astonish the natives at Jemmy Dyce's free-and-easy. He proposed to give us his experience at the Edina Infirmary, where he sometimes acted as clinical clerk. For one hour he piled on the agony, and horrified the two girls, who, like most dissipated persons who are hastening to the grave, dreaded to talk about death in a familiar manner.

It was daylight before the drinking came to an end. Nannie and her sister begged me to stay until it was time to go to the theatre. This I declined, which so offended the girl that she suggested that I had better not think of lodging at her sister's house unless I could make myself more agreeable. She was quite intoxicated, and I did not choose to argue with her. While she was asking her sister where I could sleep, I slipped out at the front door and ran down the three flights of stone steps as if a policeman had been after me. Turning to the right, I found myself in the street. The air was delightfully refreshing after the atmosphere from which I had just escaped. It was five o'clock, and I thought it would not be a bad opportunity for making a tour of the city and looking at the many fine specimens of architecture for which Edina is noted.

After wandering about for a couple of hours, I slipped into my hotel without attracting much attention. When I had got into my comfortable bed I began to reflect upon my position. Since I had left my home I had passed through dangers enough to satisfy any youth who had a thirst for adventure, but I was as far from the goal I hoped to reach as when I left Irwell to join McFudge's

company. I now believe that if I had left my home with my parents' consent I should have returned to the profession my father had chosen for me, instead of risking my health and my good name by living amongst a set of men whose spare hours were spent in debauchery. The first woman I had met in a good theatre invited me to a shebeen. This was a bad beginning, but worse remained behind. The ballet girl I found in the wings at the Edina Theatre was a Diana compared with some of the actresses I subsequently came in contact with before I trod the metropolitan boards. It is well for us that we cannot "look into the seeds of time and say which grain will grow and which will not," or many of us would rather risk a speedy journey to the "Unknown World" than go on struggling year after year for a bare existence.

When I look back upon my past life, and reproduce in my mind's eye the scenes upon the world's stage in which I have played a part, the bitter disappointments I have endured, and the price I have had to pay for every hour's happiness I have enjoyed, I exclaim, with Mr. Mallock, "Is life worth living?" and my answer is somewhat different to that of the popular philosopher.

I did not run away from Edina; but stuck to my post and received the promised part of three lines, in the piece that followed "Rob Roy." In the next production I was entrusted with a small character part, and I was as proud as a peacock when the management complimented me on my rendering of the character. The ballet girl who first fascinated me always behaved well in the theatre, and I was assured by Keech and others

that I had better say nothing about my first night's adventure, if I wanted to agree with the male members of the company, who were all on good terms with Nannie and her sister.

It was uphill work that first season of mine at Edina. I was always longing for a good part, but I never had anything beyond utility business, except on special occasions when a piece with an unusually heavy cast was selected. Out of my guinea a week I had to buy a stock of articles called properties.

Many persons imagine that actors and actresses have all their costumes found by the management, but that is an error. Such articles as square-cut coats, vests, knee-breeches, velvet shirts, shapes, and Grecian or Roman costumes are supplied from the theatre wardrobe, but all kinds of wigs, tights, boots, shoes, stockings, and ruffles are provided by the actors themselves. Let us suppose that the "School for Scandal" was to be produced: the man who was cast for Charles or Joseph would have to find his white court wig, *chapeau bras*, lace sleeves, ruffle, silk stockings, shoes, and buckles. He would receive from the wardrobe mistress his coat, vest, and breeches. Not being prepared with a stock of properties when I joined the profession, I had something to purchase for every part I played. In modern dramas or comedies all the clothes worn by the characters are the actors' own property. Ladies fare worse than the gentlemen. They have to find everything, and it is absurd for any lady to think of going in for general leading business with less than two hundred pounds' worth of dresses. I have known an actress pay as much

as six hundred pounds for the costumes she required for one play. The late Madame Beatrice used to send to Paris for some of her dresses, and many of them cost over a hundred pounds apiece. The private wardrobes of the leading tragedians were like fortunes to the owners, although they would not have realised much ready money at a sale. There is an actor now living who, when he was a stock leading man at a second-rate theatre, used to spend about three-fourths of his salary in dresses and ornaments. His income was about £250 a year; so the reader will understand that this careful actor had very little money to spend on luxuries. Sometimes I managed to borrow a wig or a pair of shoes, but I am sure five shillings a week did not cover my wardrobe expenses. After a few months' hard work, during which time I played in tragedies, melodramas, comedies, and ballets, I seceded from the Edina Theatre and accepted an engagement as walking gentleman at a large theatre in the North of England. I did not care for Scotland, and I was tired of general utility. I wanted to get a chance of playing a good part. There was a full company at the Theatre Royal, Edina, before I joined; therefore my chances of playing an important *rôle* in that house were very remote. Mr. Winter disapproved of my wishing for a change, but he accepted the usual fortnight's notice, and gave me some good advice on the day of my departure. In due course I opened at the Coaltown Theatre, and played my first part to the satisfaction of the management.

The leading character in the drama was sustained by a star who was fulfilling a fortnight's engagement at

Coaltown. He was an admirable melodramatic actor, and a great favourite in the north. On the Wednesday of his second week at Coaltown, "Hamlet" was put up for his benefit. Now, throughout the whole range of dramatic literature, there is no play easier to produce than Shakespeare's noble tragedy of "Hamlet." In the most wretchedly-appointed theatre an old green baize, a rampart set, a palace arch chamber, a back landscape, and a pair of castle-gates are usually to be found. And what temple of the drama does not possess a couple of huge throne-chairs, upholstered with Turkey twill and all ablaze with Dutch metal. The bare announcement that "Hamlet" would be played for one night was sufficient to gladden the hearts of the stage-carpenter and the property-man. The prompter would scribble his plots, *i.e.*, lists of scenery and accessories required for the tragedy in a few moments, and many an experienced property-master would scorn to accept a "plot" of "Hamlet." There is, however, one most important "property" used in the first scene of the fifth act of that tragedy, and its absence would be fatal alike to the Gravedigger and the Prince of Denmark It is nothing more nor less than a human skull—Yorick's skull! Now, the managers of some provincial theatres cannot boast of having in their heterogeneous collection of properties a real *cranium viri.* Consequently, the ingenuity of the property-man, that veritable Jack-of-all-trades, is frequently put to a severe test before a presentable substitute can be produced.

Sometimes a gigantic turnip, with cavities scooped out to represent the orbits, nose, and mouth, and occasionally

a barber's wig-block has to do duty for the skull of the Jester. I have seen a star tragedian soliloquising over a ball of brown paper, and pointing to an imaginary mouth where hung those lips that he had kissed he knew not how oft. On more than one occasion during my experience the property-man, who scorned to look at a plot of "Hamlet," and who professed to "know the play backwards, sir," proved his profound (?) knowledge of the play by ignoring the skull altogether. When at the last moment a ball of paper, or *anything brown*, has been extemporised, "curses, not loud, but deep," have fallen upon the head of the offending property-man, who has had to steer clear of the irate tragedian for the rest of the evening.

Tom Saunders, the property-man at the Coaltown Theatre, was a clever artisan; he could make anything, from a fiddle to a string of sausages. He was an admirable modeller, and quite competent to mould in *papier mâché* a skull that would deceive the eye of any sawbones who chanced to be in front. But Tom had a serious failing, he was fond of "twos of Irish," and on the day in question he had been twoing it a little too-too. Of course, he "knowed the piece backwards, sir," but he forgot all about the skull, and the rascal's neglect was not discovered before the end of the third act.

The theatre was crammed. The *élite* of Coaltown were present, and the performance was under the "distinguished patronage of the mayor, Mr. Ferram, the great colliery proprietor." The guilty Claudius was just rushing off, howling for "lights, lights," when Jackson, the stage-manager, dashed into my dressing-

room, and, with a look of disgust upon his face, exclaimed, "That beast Saunders is tight again, and he's forgotten the skull. You've finished as the Player King, and you've nothing more to do, have you?"

"No, sir."

"Run to the nearest barber's and borrow a wig-block."

I finished dressing, rushed out of the theatre, and hurried to the principal hairdresser's shop. To my dismay, I found it closed. There was a bell at the private door, which I rang furiously. A stupid-looking girl appeared.

"Where's your master?"

"He be gone to the theayter to see *Hamlick*."

"Have you got a wig-block you could lend me?"

"Eh?"

"A wig-block. I saw one yesterday in the shop-window with some golden ringlets on it. Take off the curls and give it to me at once. I'll make it all right with your master to-morrow morning."

"I'll give yer in charge if yer doant be orf." So saying, she slammed the door in my face.

After muttering a few words which were anything but complimentary to the fair sex of Coaltown, and barber's servants in particular, I hailed an empty cab which was passing.

"Drive me to the doctor's," I shouted to the cabby, as I leaped into the fly.

"Which on 'em, sir?"

"I don't care a hang, whichever you like, only be quick."

"All right, sir. I 'spose Doctor Coffin 'll do for yer?"

In two minutes the cab stopped at Doctor Coffin's door. A sleepy-looking page-boy answered my vigorous pull at the bell.

"Dr. Coffin at home?"

"No, sir, he's gone to the play with the mayor.

"Confound it, all Coaltown is at the show. Here, cabby, take me to another doctor—the nearest."

"Dr. Vomer, sir?"

"All right. I'll pay you double fare if you'll stir up that old screw of yours."

The promise of a good tip acted like magic upon man and beast, and away we rattled towards the High Street.

Dr. Vomer *was* at home. The servant led me into the surgery, and a dapper little man, with a shining pate fringed with a few snowy white hairs, smiled bandly as he entered the room.

"Doctor," I exclaimed excitedly, "will you lend me your skull?"

"My skull, sir, my skull! Oh, I see. Pray, be calm, my dear sir, rest yourself a bit, and then we will discuss your case."

He evidently concluded that I was an escaped lunatic.

"Pray do not misunderstand me. I thought you might have a skull."

"Indeed, I have, sir."

"Will you favour me with the loan of it for half an hour—only half an hour?"

"I should be most happy to oblige you, but"—look-

ing at his watch—"it is almost supper-time, and when one sups one's skull is indispensable."

"You have a skeleton, sir?"

"True."

"Do you mind disconnecting the skull? I am an actor, sir. We are playing 'Hamlet' to-night. It is the mayor's bespeak; and the performance will come to an untimely end unless I can borrow your skull for the graveyard scene."

"Oh, I begin to understand," said the little man, laughing heartily. "Certainly, if you will take care of it." And, going to his osteological cabinet, he handed me the coveted article.

"A thousand thanks," I exclaimed, as I opened the street-door, and rushed to the cab. I arrived at the theatre with my ghastly burden just as the prompter was ready to ring up. The treasure was deposited in Ophelia's grave, and mixed with a shovelful of mould and a few beef and mutton bones obtained for an "order" at the cook-shop next door.

The gravedigger, when he saw the skull, exclaimed, "What a beauty!" The drop ascended, and the fifth act began. When Hamlet picked up the head of the Jester there was a murmur of admiration from the audience, Yorick's skull was a great success.

At the expiration of nine months, I left Coaltown, and accepted an engagement to play an important part in a pantomime, under the management of a Mr. Bunter, who had taken the old Quakerton Theatre for the Christmas season. Bunter was a respectable man; who, to my knowledge, had never deliberately committed a

dishonest action. He was a manager in a very small way, it is true, but he had never been known to run away with his company's salaries. At the time of his leasing the Quakerton Theatre, he had a few hardly-earned pounds in his possession, which enabled him to send to Glasgow for some large-coloured posters of clowns with red-hot pokers, and big-nosed policemen in the act of arresting thieving old pantaloons, just as they were helping themselves to geese and sausages. Behind a heap of rubbish in the scene dock lay an old transformation set, which had done duty for several pantomimes. This was again brought to the fore, painted by the scenic artist in glaring colours, and decorated by Bunter and family with Dutch metal, leaden jewels, and foil paper. When it was finished, it was pronounced "gorgeous," and called in the bills, "The Fairies' Bower, or the Home of Beauty and the Realms of Bliss." The old stock scenery was redaubed, and a few demon masks were fished out from the flies, and handed for renovation to the man who did duty as property-master and baggage-man.

The company engaged for the Grand Christmas Pantomime of "Dick Whittington and His Cat" was made up of a few poor creatures, who had spent the greater portion of their lives starving in the small towns within a radius of thirty miles of Quakerton. Bunter could do just as he liked with these people. They were always ready when he wanted to engage them; and it was understood that the usual fortnight's notice was not to be observed on either side. If Bunter did not require their services, he could discharge them at once. If they

wished to leave him, they were free to do so; but, as Bunter was the only manager who did business in the "smalls" in that district, who paid salaries, he had it pretty well his own way. The people Bunter usually engaged were not likely to receive offers from the managers of large provincial or London theatres. They had a supreme contempt for the Queen's English, and their reputation rested upon their shouting abilities. There was Sloggs, the heavy man or villain, who played the Demon King in the Pantomime, a burly fellow, with greasy black hair, a lowering brow, a huge moustache, a deep, husky voice, a sallow complexion, and a Saturnine expression calculated to convey the idea of deep thought. The juvenile man, who was a shabby, genteel youth with a well-waxed moustache, a penny cigar in his mouth (whenever he could afford to buy one), and a light cane between his fingers, which he was constantly twirling, was in his own estimation a regular lady-killer. The low comedian or comic man, a little tub-shaped fellow, with a face that had become hideously distorted by constant muscular contortion, was rather too fond of beer and playing at skittles. On the stage he was a dreadful gagger, always introducing his own puerile wit, which he considered vastly superior to the dialogue of the author. Then there were two or three half-starved utility men who spent the greater portion of the money they earned in beer, pipes, and tobacco. Bunter was his own leading man, which saved him one of the heaviest items on a manager's salary list.

Of the ladies Mrs. Bunter was the principal, although she was the mother of ten children, and a lady o'

aldermanic *embonpoint*. She played the Juliets, Ophelias, and Desdemonas. A burlesque star was "specially engaged" to play Dick Whittington. She was one of those ladies who had been educated in a music-hall, and she transferred to the stage of the theatre the coarse jests, the impudent sagacity, and the eccentric pronunciation characteristic of the school. She trusted in kicking up her heels to atone for her lack of every qualification of the artiste. Her hair was golden (dyed), and her voice was cracked by the constant howling of slangy music-hall ditties. The heavy and old woman had played leading parts in her youthful days. She was the most ill-tempered female one could imagine—everything appeared to her in the darkest colours, and she construed the most innocent actions or the slightest remarks of the junior members of the company into wrong-doing and light-speaking. The remaining members of the company, Tom Smart and his sister Polly, were, what are termed, pantomimists. They had been engaged for Christmas only: Tom to play the Cat and Harlequin, and Polly to represent the Fairy Queen and Columbine.

Poor Tom Smart was a delicate youth. For three or four years he had been troubled with a short, dry cough, and his pinched and flushed cheeks signified plainly the state of his health. Both brother and sister had been bred in theatres, or, as Bunter used to express it, "they were cradled in the property-room."

Tom had been well broken in to his business by his father, who was a pantomimist in the days of Edmund Kean, and boasted of having seen the great tragedian play clown on one occasion. That was, of course, before

Kean went to London. Tom Smart was in a rapid consumption, and, although his services were invaluable at Christmas-time, he was not much use in a theatre during the rest of the year. He could not speak half a dozen words without making a grammatical blunder. Only on special occasions was Tom in requisition—when the management played such pieces as "The Dumb Man of Manchester," or "Jack Robinson and his Monkey." As a pantomimist he had few equals. He could play a cat to the admiration and delight of the youthful portion of an audience, and his leaps through shop-windows satisfied even the most exacting of gallery-boys: But for his sister, Tom would have died of starvation many a time, when the little Christmas savings had vanished. But Polly was a good girl, and loved her brother. She could play "walking ladies" all the year round, and she kept him, and watched over him with motherly tenderness. Christmas-time was their harvest, and Tom was very sanguine this year, and looked forward to making a good benefit at Quakerton. The rehearsals commenced six days before the opening night. Tom was very weak, and he caused Bunter much disappointment by missing his leaps several times in succession. The poor lad cried with vexation when his strength failed him, and one day he turned to Bunter and said, "Don't be cross, sir; I shall be all-right at night, indeed I shall. I never queered a manager's pitch yet, and I never shall." Bunter, with mistaken good-nature, would send for two-pennyworths of hot rum-and-water, which he forced the lad to drink. The spirit gave Tom fresh vigour, and the rehearsals finished satisfactorily. Christmas Day arrived,

and there was no necessity for the company to spend it in the damp old theatre. Bunter was a kind-hearted soul, in his way, and unlike many managers of larger theatres, who consider themselves very much injured if the company refuse to rehearse on Christmas Day. He treated his actors to "twos of rum" all round, at the public-house adjoining the theatre, and sent them home wishing them a merry Christmas, begging them to be punctual at the final rehearsal on Boxing Day. At their humble lodging in Quakerton Tom Smart and his loving sister spent Christmas Day. They had no roast beef and plum-pudding—not they—they couldn't afford such luxuries. Nor did they repine. They were content with a couple of mutton-chops and a plain suet pudding, with a pennyworth of treacle to make it "tasty." After dinner, Polly busied herself with Tom's dress of patches and spangles. That finished, she washed and dyed, with two-pennyworth of carmine, a pair of silk tights, while Tom elaborated his cat's mask, and stitched a new tail to his hairy costume. Just before the brother and sister retired for the night, Tom was seized with a fainting-fit. The landlady was summoned, and half a gill of brandy sent for. More alcohol!—always alcohol! Tom soon revived, and Polly, who was used to such attacks, did not fear any danger. As he kissed his sister, the poor lad said:

"Polly, if I make a good benefit, you shall have a new hat and jacket. I have faith in this town, dear."

"I am pleased you think so, Tom. Heaven give you strength to get through to-morrow night. Good night, and God bless you!"

The next day there was a final rehearsal, more for the stupid supers than the actors. Everything was ready for the performance, and at seven o'clock the house opened. There was a good crush at the gallery and pit entrances, and the boxes gradually filled. Bunter, who was in ecstasies at seeing so good a house, rushed behind the scenes, and gave his portly wife an affectionate hug which nearly took her breath away.

"Didn't I tell you, Susan,"—her name on the bills was Madame Ombra Woodini—"this theatre has been badly managed. In my hands it will be a little gold-mine. They all say that. This panto will set me on my legs, old girl. Where's the cat? Where's Tom?"

"He looked very bad when he came in at the stage-door. I feel quite nervous about him. If he breaks down, what shall we do, John? There isn't another cat like him in the profession."

"Oh, he'll be all right when he gets on the boards, excitement will keep him up. I'll go and fetch him two-of rum hot. Where's the property-man?"

"I can't find him, and the clown is swearing because his baby and red-hot poker are not ready."

"Will you look him up while I get Tom's two pen'orth?"

The gallery boys began to stamp and whistle because they were tired of waiting. The property-man rushed in, wiping his mouth and smelling strongly of beer. The signal was given, the flyman ran to his place. Up went the curtain, discovering Dick Whittington and his cat. What a burst of admiration! what shrieks of delight, when the little ones in front caught sight of pussy.

Tom, fired with the rum, seemed in good form. He ran about on all fours, then stood on his hind legs, played with his tail, mewed, purred, and gambolled about his master (the music-hall blonde) to the intense delight of young and old. The gallery boys set up caterwauling; but their noise ceased when Dick stepped forward to sing his first song. While the "blonde" was singing, puss was very quiet. He lay perfectly motionless. No notice was taken of this by the people in the wings, because it was usual for pantomimists to stop heir nonsense when the principals were singing.

The song over, Dick turned to the cat, and repeated a few lines of doggerel written by myself, the end of which was the cue for puss to recommence his antics. "Puss, puss, puss," cried Dick. No answer—no mew. The lines were repeated. Still no movement.

"Meaw, meaw, meaw," yelled the gallery boys in chorus.

"T'cat's drunk!" shouted a big rough.

"It's another swindle," exclaimed a man in the pit.

Polly, who had just come from her dressing-room, shrieked in the most heart-rending tones. If she could have acted as well, she would have made a fortune. "Tom! Oh, my dear Tom. Mr. Bunter, Tom has fainted. Carry him off. Carry him off."

Bunter, who was bewildered, begged Polly to be quiet. "You'll ruin me! you'll ruin me," he exclaimed piteously. "Tom'll be all right in a minute. Hi, Tom, pull yourself together, lad. Crawl off and I'll send for two pen'orth." Alas, Tom did not hear him. His soul had fled, and nothing remained but a heap of inanimate clay rolled up in an imitation cat's skin.

Without waiting for permission, Polly pulled the curtain-bell. The act-drop descended. The sister threw herself upon her brother, crying, in tones of anguish, "Tom, Tom, speak to your poor sister! Polly's here, dear. Never mind, you shan't play again if you're ill. Let them get another cat. Only speak to me,—speak to Polly."

A doctor who was in front made his way behind the scenes, and, kneeling down by the human cat, felt his heart, and gravely shook his head. Good Mrs. Bunter assisted to carry Polly, who had fainted, to her dressing-room. The manager told the sad news to the audience, and the theatre was quickly emptied. Not one man asked for his money to be returned. Silently the audience left the building, awe-struck.

Four demons carried all that remained of poor Tom Smart to the treasury, where he was stripped of his cat-skin and washed. Three days later he was buried in the Quakerton Cemetery, followed by Bunter and his company, who had generously defrayed the funeral expenses.

The business never revived after that fatal night, and Bunter's season soon came to an end.

My next engagement was at the Cottontown Theatre, where I first met an actor who was known all through the profession as a veritable Don Juan. To my thinking, he was a monster of iniquity, and how he managed to keep without the pale of the law is a marvel beyond my comprehension. He was good-looking and well educated, and a great favourite with the ladies who knew nothing of his vile practices. In one town where he

was engaged, his intrigue with a married lady led to the suicide of the husband. In another place he ruined three sisters in one family. At a theatre in the North of England, where this man acted for a season, there were two respectable sisters employed as extras. The villain soon discovered that the girls were virtuous, and marked them for his prey. When he left the town to accept an engagement at another provincial theatre, the younger of the two girls, heart-broken at her betrayer's departure, confided her woes to her sister, who was horrified to learn that they were both in the same condition.

These two unfortunate girls sought refuge in death. Their bodies were dragged out of the canal six weeks after their mutual confession.

This scoundrel boasted that he helped a woman to kill an infant by feeding it upon bread and water. The child was his, and, to quote his own words, "he was only doing it a kindness and saving it a world of trouble."

For years this man had waged war against morality. The moment he entered a town, he set to work in search of victims. It was his boast that he never courted the society of loose women. He always cast his net for the young and innocent or other men's wives.

He was a plausible fellow, who never showed his teeth until the prey was in his power. After he had gratified his vanity and appeased his desires, he shook off his victims, and never cared what became of them, so long as they did not trouble him. He scattered the seeds of vice wherever he went, and no respectable stage novice was safe where he was engaged.

I had not been long at Cottontown before the Prince of Light Comedians, the late Charles Mathews, played a starring engagement. I had heard a deal about this eminent actor, but I must confess that many of the dressing-room stories relating to Charles Mathews were gross exaggerations. I have heard actors assert that he never cared for the exact text, and that he would often say to an imperfect "fluffer" at rehearsal, "Never mind, my boy, say something like it at night; I can pull through."

I found Mathews a most particular man; he required every syllable, and expected the correct cues, or there was a row when the curtain fell. A great deal has been said about Charles Mathews's extravagance and generosity. I cannot speak of the early part of his career; but whenever I met him his meanness was the most striking trait of his private character. Benefit performances were distasteful to him, and he never cared to put himself out of the way to oblige or assist an actor in distress. An old gentleman, formerly a member of his company, used to tell the following characteristic stories of Charles Mathews. One evening, during the time the comedian was lessee of the Olympic Theatre, a stage carpenter broke a blood-vessel just before the commencement of the performance. The dying man fell in the prompt entrance.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Mathews.

"The carpenter is dying, sir. Will you send for a doctor?" replied the stage-manager.

"Pull him out of the wing! Don't keep the curtain down, sir! Ring up! ring up!"

A poor ballet-girl once called upon him at the Lyceum, and begged for an engagement.

"I have nothing to offer you, my dear. Why don't you take in plain needle-work?"

"I can't get it to do, sir, and I am almost starving."

"Try crochet, then; it's very fashionable just now. Good morning."

The reader may wonder why all this time I have not referred to any of the many actresses whom I met at different theatres during the first few months of my professional career.

The reason is this.

In my desire to be strictly just and impartial, I have purposely refrained from exposing the so-called weaker sex before I had pictured a few of the monsters of the stage who make the women what they are. Very few young girls can, for long, resist the temptations with which they are surrounded immediately they adopt the theatrical profession. To make my meaning perfectly clear, I will introduce a typical novice.

A young lady has received a fair education; her father dies, leaving very little, after the creditors have been paid, to support his wife and family. The girl is of a romantic disposition. She believes that she will earn a competence and a reputation on the stage. She gains her mother's consent, and advertises for a tutor. She pays ten guineas for as many lessons, and, if her master does not ruin her before she sets her foot upon the boards, she will find it hard to escape defilement when she enters upon the duties of her chosen profession. After a time

she will lose some of her maiden modesty. Before she became an actress she would have almost died with shame if a man had seen her without her frock. Now she thinks nothing of standing at the dressing-room door minus her dress body, if the prompter or stage-manager wishes to ask her a question. The various kinds of costumes she wears tend to deaden all feelings of modesty, mock or genuine. She may have to wear silk fleshings. If she has well-formed limbs, the male members of the company pass compliments; and, if there are any Shelbys about, she will have to submit to something more than compliments. On another occasion she will have to appear *décolletée*. While she is waiting in the wings to go on, her bust will be the subject of admiration; flattering words will be followed by the gentle pressure of a hand. Then a glass of wine will be recommended to give the fair artiste courage before she faces the public. Heated with alcohol, and her nerves strained to their highest tension by the applause of the audience, she will fall a ready prey; and, when she is deserted for another *débutante*, she, in her turn, will look out for victims, and thus the wheel of life goes round.

I remarked, in passing, that the dramatic pupil *might* be ruined by her master before she entered a theatre. This is no exaggeration, and I can verify the statement. I once met an independent lady, who told me a story about a leading actor who answered an advertisement she inserted in the *Epoch*. The lady did not care to go to the actor's house to receive her lessons, but offered him a heavier fee to come to her residence. She solemnly assured me that her tutor made improper proposals to

her on the occasion of his second visit, and so persistent was he that she was obliged to forfeit her fees and order her servants to refuse him admittance. I have certainly met with a number of professional women who were naturally vicious; but the majority of the actresses, who have to thank the stage and its surroundings for the loss of that which they held most dear, might have found it quite as easy to take the straight road if they had not fallen amongst scoundrels, who discovered the weak spots in their armour, and by any means, fair or foul, led them into the by-paths of sin and shame.

An actress rarely becomes irreclaimably bad unless she takes to drink. I have known many estimable women who have lived the purest of lives after their one *faux pas*. They seldom marry or live for long with their seducers. As they gain experience they find that the men who tempt women and rob them of their chastity are rarely influenced by what is termed love. They live with their betrayers for a while in a Fools' Paradise, and when disputes arise they are glad to be set free. Sometimes they marry off the stage, but the rule is to live with an actor who makes love in real fashion with his eyes wide open, knowing all about the past. In many instances these matches have turned out happily, and, as I before stated, I have known the ladies thus mated live irreproachable lives, both on and off the stage.

I have often been asked by outsiders to account for the great amount of drunkenness amongst actors and actresses. The habit of excessive drinking is acquired through false and unscientific reports which persons who are fond of alcohol delight to circulate. A young actor or actress is

told that a glass of spirits will check nervousness on first nights, or that alcohol is necessary to stimulate the system after an exhausting scene, and scores of other excuses as ridiculous as they are hurtful. How many times have I heard people say: "Ah, So-and-so, the great tragedian, always acted better when he was drunk"; or, "Old Laughwell, the comedian, never goes on the stage until he is three sheets in the wind." These stories are false. No man can act well when he is drunk. To successfully portray subtleties of character and human passions the actor must be in the full possession of his mental faculties, his mind must be nicely-balanced and perfectly clear. Old playgoers who have not forgotten the late Gustavus Brooke will do well to read Mr. John Coleman's interesting article, "A Lost Tragedian," which appeared in a recent number of *Longman's Magazine*. Brooke was a lost tragedian in more senses than one; but for the accursed drink, he would have been the finest actor and the greatest ornament to the dramatic profession of his time. Talk about a man acting well under the influence of alcohol! Why, I have seen some of the most disgraceful exhibitions the mind can conceive caused through drunkenness. In an old-fashioned drama which was played one night at a country theatre where I was engaged, the villain who had murdered one of the characters was ordered to undergo the ordeal by touch. At the back of the court-scene was a gauze screen, and at the back of the screen stood the ghost of the murdered man. To make the ghost visible to the audience two pans of blue fire had to be lighted by the property-man at a given signal. The

heavy man who played the villain was very drunk—his usual condition on a Saturday night. All the innocent characters fearlessly walked up to the dummy body and touched it. Then came the villain's turn. The murderer, who had been leaning against the O.P. wing, made an attempt to reach the couch where the body lay, but on his way he staggered and fell through the gauze screen, knocking the ghost off his pedestal. Both spectre and murderer rolled to the front, and the curtain had to be lowered. On another occasion, a Saturday night too, an actor who had held a good position at Drury-lane, and lost it through drink, was playing the leading part in a melodrama of the transpontine school. In the last act he had to struggle with six Bow-street runners, three on each side. The drunken actor stood in the centre of the stage, grinning idiotically, without making the least attempt to escape. The six men closed in upon him, and the prompter at the side yelled, "Throw them off! throw them off!" The actor turned his head and said in reply, "All right, old boy, I know how to act; you can't teach me my business." But he made no effort to escape from the constables. The head super whispered to his colleagues, "Let's struggle with *him* and throw *ourselves* off." Obeying their leader the men dragged the actor up and down the stage three or four times, and then retreated, three into each corner, as if they had been thrown off after a terrific struggle.

The leading man ought then to have rushed to the door, as if attempting to escape, but he stood perfectly still in the centre of the stage, grinning and repeating, "Teach me to act, will you? I know my business."

The comedian who was waiting at the back with a loaded pistol, ready to fire and shoot the murderer as he was endeavouring to escape, thought he would bring the piece "to Hecuba." He entered through the door and fired, but what did the old actor care about a pistol shot. He merely muttered, "Teach me my business, will they?" and kept his ground. The property-man, who was standing in the wing with a loaded rifle, as a double, in case the comedian's pistol missed fire, winked at the comic man, who presented his horse-pistol at the murderer, and the rifle was fired. This second shot had no effect, the murderer would not die. The scene in front baffles description; the gallery roughs were shouting at the top of their voices, "Stab him," "Give him a dose of poison," "Purr him, lads!" At last, the comedian tripped him up, and stabbed him with the butt end of his pistol. The curtain was lowered, and the audience left the theatre growling, and threatening to withdraw their patronage.

One evening, about thirteen years ago, I was on my way from London to the Isle of Man. I had to wait a day and two nights at Greatport, and to kill the time I went in front of one of the theatres, which was situated near the docks. The first piece was a modern drama.

In the second act I was astonished to see a Red Indian, armed with a tomahawk, crawl on and strike a blow at the actor who was playing the heavy part. I was still more surprised when I heard the villain exclaim, "Get off, you d—d fool, you're not on in this piece!" The Red Indian refused to leave the stage, and the act had to be quickly ended. As the Indian and

the scalping business had nothing to do with the modern play, I made for the stage-door, to learn the cause of the curious scene I had witnessed.

There was a terrible commotion behind the curtain. In the centre of the stage stood the Indian, arguing with the manager, who was in a fearful passion. "Don't talk to me, sir," said the Indian, shaking his tomahawk in the stage-manager's face, "I have done my business, and I mean to go home." "My friend," the lessee of the theatre turned to me and exclaimed, "what do you think of this drunken hound? He was cast for the part of Piankishaw in 'Nick of the Woods,' and he went on in the drawing-room scene of the first piece, and struck the heavy man with his tomahawk. He's so drunk that he imagines he has finished for the night, and swears he'll go home." The Indian would not be convinced that "Nick of the Woods" had not yet commenced. Breaking through the group of actors and supers, he staggered to his dressing-room, washed off the war-paint, and left the theatre. His part had to be played by the prompter, and the audience had the pleasure of seeing two Piankishaws that evening.

On the morning of my departure for the island, I met a dock-labourer who recognised me. He had formerly held a good position on the stage. Drink had reduced him to his present position. He had played important parts with Charles Mathews and Samuel Phelps. When sober he could play anything, but he was never to be depended on. At the age of thirty-five he gave up acting for dock-labouring, because every theatre was closed to him. He was called by his ac-

quaintances the "*Beer-eater.*" Nothing less than half a gallon of beer at a time would satisfy him. He was familiarly known in Greatport as the "Linnet." Why he was named after that sweet singing-bird I never discovered.

He was once engaged to play a part in a rubbishing drama entitled "Roger Richborne," which was produced at a low theatre at Greatport, founded on the romantic story of the Tichborne claimant. The actor who impersonated Sir Roger had a suit of clothes made large enough to cover an india-rubber air-bag, which was inflated every night to make him resemble the Claimant in bulk. The manager of the theatre thought it would improve the business if a man made up as Sir Roger paraded the streets of the town in the day-time, followed by two flunkeys distributing hand-bills. The supers and scene-shifters were asked to play the part of this walking advertisement, but one and all declined. When the "Linnet" heard that the manager offered eighteen-pence a day and half a gallon of beer for a man who would make up as Sir Roger, he cheerfully consented to walk for three or four hours through the principal thoroughfares of Greatport. Punctually the "Linnet" appeared at the theatre the next morning, and made up as the Claimant. Air was pumped into the bag, and he was blown out to an enormous size. His face was fringed with whiskers, made by a theatrical wig-maker, who had a carte-de-visite of the Claimant to guide him. A new hat was purchased by the management, and promised to the "Linnet," as a present, if he behaved himself. Two bill-distributors

dressed as footmen followed Sir Roger, who, armed with a thick walking-stick, set forth on his advertising expedition. The first day passed without any mishap. The flunkeys assured the manager that Sir Roger had not imbibed more than the prescribed quantity of beer.

The next day the "Linnet" walked as far as the Greatport Stock Exchange, where the members received him with cheers, and saluted him as the rightful heir. Some young brokers invited Sir Roger to a neighbouring restaurant, and told the waiters to supply him with whatever he liked to drink. What a chance for the "Linnet"! He drank beer, wine, and spirits, until he was helplessly drunk. Then the young fellows on 'Change bonneted him and tried to burst his air-bag. Just before the opening of the theatre, the manager met Sir Roger, minus his hat and whiskers, staggering towards the stage-door, supported between the two, flunkeys, who were almost as drunk as the sham Claimant himself.

The actresses I have met who were slaves to drink seldom kept an engagement for long in a decent theatre; they generally finished their lives in low booths, or left the stage to become the mistresses of rich young scamps or decrepid old aristocrats.

Instead of troubling the reader with the details of my own professional career, a list of the parts I have played, the numerous theatres in which I have acted, the thousands of miles I have travelled, and the salaries I have been promised and paid, I will now endeavour to give a faithful picture of the London and Provincial stage, dealing with the most important branches of the

profession. It will be sufficient for me to state, in reference to myself, that I had to work my way up by degrees. I served a long and arduous apprenticeship ere I made my bow before a London audience, and I can say, without a grain of egotism, that whatever success I have achieved on the stage has been due to my own unflagging energies and years of severe study. Many of the gentlemanly youths who, after a few months' practice, manage to pull through creditably in modern comedy would cut sorry figures in tights, and Shakespeare would turn in his grave if he heard them murdering his blank verse. Whenever a classical play is produced, the men who have gone through the mill are always in requisition, and there are a few sterling actors still living who shine as brilliantly in modern comedy as they did in the legitimate or the romantic drama of bygone days.

CHAPTER III.

BALLET GIRLS, EXTRAS, AND CHORUS SINGERS.

The Manager who tried to engage only Respectable Females —The "Nymphs of the Coral Cave" and their Admirers —The Stage an Adjunct to Prostitution—Chorus Ladies— Obscene Talk in Theatrical Dressing-rooms—The Opinion of a Wardrobe Mistress: "Vice Cleaner than Virtue!"— The Mysterious Ballet Girl—Ruined and Robbed by a "Theatrical Agent" — The Agency System — How Managers have been imposed upon by Theatrical Agents —The Pantomime Actress recommended by an Agent —What is Incompetency?—The Decision of a British Jury—A London Ballet in a Country Town—A Contest between Local Prostitutes and London Ballet Girls— Actresses who have risen from the Ballet.

IT is usual for outsiders to classify all females who do not speak upon the stage under one heading—the ballet; but the ballet girl proper is a dancer. She can earn twice or thrice as much money as an extra, and her services are only required when an incidental dance is introduced, or at Christmas-time, when the ballet is an important feature of the entertainment. The girls who appear in dramas as peasants and mute servants are called extras. In the provinces they get one shilling a night for their work, in London they are paid one-and-sixpence. There are a few respectable ballet girls, but the majority of the "ladies" of the *corps de ballet* are females of very easy virtue.

Some years ago the wife of the lessee of a large provincial theatre begged her husband, when he was select-

ing the girls for his pantomime, to engage only respectable females. He promised to be very particular, and picked out the most modest-looking girls he could find. Conceive the lady's horror when she was told a week or two after the pantomime was in full swing that three-fourths of the fairies were common prostitutes. Every night at about eleven o'clock the stage-door was blocked with young fellows who were waiting for the "Nymphs of the Coral Cave," as they were styled in the programme. These girls considered it a good stroke of business to get in the pantomime; it gave them a chance of appearing in gorgeous costumes, which displayed their well-proportioned limbs, and infatuated the silly fellows, who, moth-like, are attracted by the artificial light and tinselled drapery which hide the imperfections of the stage siren.

I must do this particular manager the justice to state that he discharged a few of the most notorious women who openly boasted of their calling; but if he had got rid of all the disreputable females he had engaged for the pantomime, the entertainment would have been reduced to a burlesque, minus the ballet and transformation-scenes, and such an apology for a pantomime would have resulted in an empty treasury. There are managers who would not care to engage respectable women as extras: they would not draw the young swells, their gestures would not be suggestive enough, and it would entail too much labour to teach them to imitate the artful hussies, who are so perfect in their sly glances and the little points that always aid them in netting their prey. Of late years opera-bouffe has been extremely

popular. Now, a comic opera without a troupe of pretty chorus-singers would be condemned by the press and the public as a managerial fraud.

I am rather inclined to believe that opera-bouffe chorus singers are as bad, if not worse, than the ordinary ballet and extra girls of the London theatres. The chorus lady must have a decent voice, she must be tolerably good looking, and possess well-formed limbs. She receives about a guinea a week for her services, and she is expected to keep herself and dress well out of that modest stipend. She frequently comes to the theatre in a brougham, dressed more like a countess than a poor vocalist. She occasionally boasts that she wears real diamonds, while the *prima* is obliged to be contented with paste. She has some influence with the acting-manager, because she has the power to help him in the letting of the stage-boxes. The modern chorus singer does not make any secret of her doings outside the theatre. I was once engaged at a house where a number of chorus ladies were retained. My dressing-room was separated from theirs by a thin wooden partition. Every night I had to listen to their filthy stories, and their adventures with the young aristocrats who submitted to their fleecings. While they were dressing, the conversation (allowing for needful suppressions) would be something like the following:

"Well, Amy! how did you get on last night with your swell?"

"Oh, first rate. I landed him at my crib, and he made me a present of this beautiful diamond ring before he left me."

"Oh, how lovely!"

"Isn't it? He said it was an heirloom, and was given to him by his mother on her death-bed."

"And the young fool gave it to you?"

"Yes, dear; how could he resist *me?* What was your luck, Rose?"

"This sealskin jacket; young Lord Gnatbrain bought it for me in Regent-street this afternoon."

"Is he coming to-night?"

"Yes, dear, you'll see him in the O.P. box."

"Do you think you'll keep him in tow for long?"

"I don't know; he was staring very hard at that cat, Loo Vere. I shouldn't be surprised if she lands him."

Of course, I have been obliged to omit the low adjectives and the obscene details which were openly discussed by these beauties of the chorus. A leading actress, an acquaintance of mine, once told me that she had to insist upon having a dressing-room fitted up at the side of the stage opposite to where the chorus ladies dressed, because their conversation was so horribly disgusting. Let the reader imagine the effect of such talk upon a novice.

I have often had to offend actors by requesting them to discontinue swearing or using indecent language; but I have never heard anything, in the lowest provincial theatre, to equal the filthy conversations I could not help overhearing at that fashionable West-end house, when the chorus ladies were in full force.

I once remarked to the wardrobe mistress of a theatre where a great many ballet and extra girls were employed, that her duties would be far pleasanter if

managers engaged respectable girls. Her answer was: "You're mistaken, sir, and you'd agree with me if you had to try on their dresses. *Vice is always cleaner than virtue.*"

A few years ago I was acting at a theatre in the South of England where I noticed a very beautiful girl who was one of the *corps de ballet.* She seemed extremely modest and ladylike, and I thought that I had at last met with a virtuous "ballet-girl." I made inquiries, but I heard nothing against her. She was a mystery to all the members of the company. Two or three of the fast youths, including the walking gentleman, tried to make her what they imagined she was not. She accepted their presents, and met them for Sunday evening walks; but, whenever they attempted any familiarities, she suddenly left them, and appeared to be very indignant. One night she was missing when the prompter called her for the first scene. At half-past nine she turned up rather the worse for drink. All who saw her, including myself, were astonished to see the beautiful girl staggering towards the long dressing-room which was reserved for the ballet. She was not allowed to dress for the piece, and her companions advised her to go home. She loitered about the wings until the curtain fell, and I passed her on my way to the dressing-room. She was then leaning against the proscenium wing on the prompt side. When I left the theatre to go to my lodgings, I was surprised to find her standing at the corner of the little back street in which the stage-door was situated. I was about to bid her good-night, when she put her hand upon my arm and asked me if I would walk as far as

her home with her. She added that she was ill, and afraid to go alone. I began to feel suspicious; but I was then old enough to take care of myself, so I offered to accompany her to her mother's house. She was not drunk, but she had had enough alcohol to make her communicative. She asked me if I could keep a secret. I replied in the affirmative, and she began her story. Her father was a clergyman in the North of England. Two years previously he died, leaving his family almost unprovided for. She was his eldest child. It was imperative that she should earn her own living. She hated the idea of a governess's life, and she thought that she might, with a little practice, be able to earn enough to support herself upon the stage. She saw an advertisement in one of the daily papers for lady amateurs, who were wanted to join a company then forming for the production of one of the latest metropolitan successes. She obtained her mother's consent, and answered the advertisement. In reply, she received a letter from a man, who called himself a theatrical agent, stating that for ten guineas he could get her an engagement at once at a salary of twenty-five shillings a week. Both mother and daughter were delighted. They scraped the money together, and the girl started for London, and waited upon the "agent" at his residence.

The ten guineas were handed over to the man, who said that she must have a few lessons in acting before she could take the engagement he referred to in his letter. This was a disappointment to the poor girl, who had to engage lodgings, and spend the few pounds her mother had given her to buy one or two dresses and other

articles that she was in need of. The "agent" gave her the part of Portia to study, and told her that when she could read it to his satisfaction she would be competent to join the company. The girl tried her best, and presented herself at the "agent's" house every day to have her lesson.

One afternoon the girl was tempted to take some refreshment. She had had no dinner, for her funds were nearly exhausted. The wine given to her by the "agent" got into her head, and, to quote her own words, she did not know what she was doing. When it was too late, she discovered that she had been ruined, as well as robbed.

The "agent," who was only a lodger, decamped, and she was left friendless in the great city. She dared not write to her mother and tell her all, so she called upon two or three of the managers of West-end theatres and offered her services. To one gentleman she read portions of the part she had been studying, and he at once told her that she showed no signs of dramatic talent. In her despair she consented to go on as an extra, at the magnificent salary of nine shillings a week. She was soon initiated in the art of turning the nine into ninety, or even more. Necessity, she declared, drove her to accept the proposals of stage-door prowlers, and she soon had a good supply of money. Always used to a quiet country life, she longed to get away from the scenes of debauchery, in which she sometimes played a part, while she had a few pounds by her. She escaped from London, and obtained an engagement in the ballet at the theatre where I met her. She assured me that she

had always conducted herself properly until that night, when she drank more wine than she was in the habit of taking. The girl's story of that infernal "agent" made my blood almost boil with indignation. I asked her for his name. It was either Smith or Jones: I do not recollect which. He was not one of the recognised theatrical agents, who seldom, if ever, advertise in the daily papers when they receive instructions to form a company.

I naturally felt curious to know how this girl managed to live and dress well on the few shillings she received each week at the Farmouth Theatre. She told me, after a little pressing, that she had made the acquaintance of a young naval officer, who supplied her with dresses and funds. Here was a girl who was not naturally vicious led into vice by a wretch who evidently made a living by trading upon the credulity of young women who fancied they were born actresses, and who were ready to part with their money, if not their virtue, in order to gain a footing upon the stage.

The agency system has never met with the unanimous approval of the profession. I can recollect when the only two theatrical agents in England were old Danvers, who made such a hit as Dame Hatley in Burnand's burlesque of "Black-Ey'd Susan" on its first production at the Royalty Theatre, and Mr. Turner, an actor for many years associated with the Strand Theatre. These two agents transacted their business in a straightforward manner; they understood the requirements of managers, but for some reason or other they both gave up the agency business, probably through a lack of clients. Since the time of Danvers and Turner, scores

of agents have sprung up like mushrooms. Several have opened with elegantly-fitted offices and luxuriously-furnished waiting-rooms, the walls of which were hung with portraits of actors and actresses and files of play-bills. It is just possible that some of these agents would have done well if they had treated the managers fairly and honestly, but they were terribly deficient in judgment. They thought it good business to accept a big fee from a stage-struck youth or maiden for palming him or her off as a full-blown artiste. They did not, or would not, understand that the manager once bitten would be twice shy. I once applied to an agent, on behalf of a manager, for a first-rate burlesque actress to play the second-best part in a pantomime. A portrait of an extremely-pretty woman, with a fine-sounding French name, was forwarded by the agent, accompanied by a letter strongly recommending her as a lady who had been used to opera-bouffe. "By Jove, she'll do!" exclaimed the manager; "Write, and instruct the agent to engage her for the run of the pantomime."

The lady arrived in due course. Her portrait flattered her, but she was not bad looking. At the first rehearsal she displayed so much ignorance of stage business that our suspicions were aroused. Her voice was tolerably good, but it seemed very weak at rehearsal. On the first night of the pantomime, she could not be heard in the front of the house. The manager was asked by his friends where he had picked up "*that duffer.*" A rehearsal was called on the following day, and part of her music had to be given to one of the other characters. The manager, who was very indignant, because her salary was not a

small one, asked her to tell him the truth, and say where she had been previously engaged. Driven into a corner, she admitted that she had only been on the stage *once before*, and that was in the chorus of a comic opera.

This imposition seriously interfered with the success of the pantomime. The woman was hardly to blame; but the agent, who probably received a heavy fee from his client, deserved to be prosecuted for obtaining money by false pretences. Some reader may exclaim, "Why didn't the manager discharge her when he discovered her incompetence at the first rehearsal?" What is incompetency? "Ay, there's the rub." A young lady was engaged through an agent for a pantomime about seven years ago. She was so bad an actress that, after the first night, the manager suspended her, and engaged another lady to take her place. At one o'clock on the Saturday afternoon the incompetent actress entered the treasury and demanded her salary. It was paid, and a fortnight's notice handed to her, which she refused to accept. As she was leaving the theatre she informed the manager that she should come to the treasury every Saturday until the expiration of her engagement, which was dated from December until the following Easter. Every night she appeared behind the scenes and asked the stage-manager if she would be permitted to play her part. The answer was always, "No." At the expiration of the notice, the treasury was closed to her, and the lady returned to London. In due course the manager was served with a writ, and the case was tried before a jury, who found that the actress was thoroughly competent, because it had been proved by witnesses that she had

spoken every word of her part. This was the decision arrived at by twelve "intelligent" Englishmen; and the manager had to pay the balance of the salary due from the expiration of the fortnight's notice until Easter, together with the costs of the action, which amounted to a pretty stiff sum.

In the course of my experience, I have met with many incompetent youths and girls who paid the agents heavy fees to represent them to country managers as full-fledged actors and actresses. Of late years, dramatic agents have opened with a flourish of trumpets, and closed again within twelve months. Their clients got tired of the phantom engagements they were always sent after, the elegant waiting-rooms were deserted, and the "efficient staff of clerks" had to chew their quills, for the want of something better to do. To return to the ballet. A manager of my acquaintance made up his mind one year to save himself and his stage-manager a lot of trouble by sending to a London agent for a number of ballet-dancers, instead of training local extras for the pantomime. He thought it would be better to have experienced girls for the front rows; they would be more attractive than the flat-footed mill-girls who usually represented the fairies in his Christmas production. The agent engaged twenty-four London ladies, at one guinea per week each, and their fares paid. They came, saw, and conquered. The mill-girls were considered a trifle fast, but the London ballet totally eclipsed the provincials. The respectable patrons of the drama made serious complaints. The local police declared that the neighbourhood of the theatre

had never been so disorderly before the professional dancers arrived, and they prayed for their return to London. In plain English, it was a contest between the nymphs of the pavement and the ladies of the ballet. My friend never repeated the experiment, and the mill-girls had the field to themselves the following year. Parents have frequently allowed their daughters to go on the stage as extras, vainly hoping that some day they would blossom into leading actresses. During my twenty years' experience, I have only met with a few competent artistes who have risen from the ballet. One celebrated actress, who is now living, began her professional career as a supernumerary at a theatre, which is at present being used as a warehouse, in Liverpool. I can recall instances where stage and acting managers have married ballet ladies, and tried to make actresses of them, but they have rarely succeeded. They have thrust their wives before the public, it is true—much to the disgust of the legitimate members of the company and the public; they have given them handsome robes, big lines in the bills,—everything in fact but the "divine afflatus," or the Olympian fire, as it is sometimes called. Like the poet, the actor is born, not made. The art of graceful gesticulation and the tricks of the stage may be acquired with practice; but the art of acting is a heaven-born gift,—a rare talent which ought to be put to the noblest uses, not prostituted either for the sake of gain or the ephemeral praise of an uncultivated audience.

CHAPTER IV.

Green-room Talk.

The Green-rooms of Provincial Theatres—The Call-board—The Effect of a New Cast upon a Company—An "Ophelia" with False Teeth—A Fifteen-stone "Juliet" of Forty Summers—The Actor who would not Play Rosse—The Spiteful Old Woman—The Dragons of Virtue—What some Actresses will do for a Big Line in the Bills—The Effect of a Round of Applause—How Actors Judge the Merits of a Play—The Contracted Sphere of the Theatrical World—Mrs. Langtry and her Detractors—Theatrical Dressing-rooms—How the Seeds of Consumption are Sown—The Sponges of the Profession.

WHEN I was a stripling, I read a good deal about the green-room of the theatre. After I joined the profession, I was as anxious to see a green-room as Mark Twain was to meet a Parisian *grisette*.

The American humorist was disappointed, and so was I. There was nothing green about the first green-room I entered; there was something green *in* it, and that was myself.

I thought about the anecdotes of Colley Cibber, Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Peg Woffington, and wondered if green-rooms had degenerated since their time. In one corner there was an old throne-chair, painted white, and figured with gold; the dust upon the red-covered seat was about an eighth of an inch thick, and the gilt was peeling off, and showing how dirty the framework had

got since it was last painted. The walls were covered with a paper almost patternless, the damp having produced chemical changes which were fatal to colour. The floor was partially covered with well-worn cocoa-nut matting, and the furniture consisted of about four chairs, one of which was bottomless. Over the mantelpiece was a large looking-glass, also suffering from some serious chemical complaint, which gave it a mangy appearance, for there were several bald places on its mercurial back. Opposite the mirror was a board covered with green baize, upon which were pinned the casts, when fresh pieces were selected. If that call-board had had the gift of speech, what a strange story it could have told me,—of muttered curses, malicious smiles, and brutal taunts,—of heart-burnings, choking sobs, and wordy wars with prompters and stage-managers. My first introduction to a green-room was in the daytime, when the theatre was only occupied by the carpenter, his day-man, and the property-master. Little did I think, when I turned my back upon that miserable hole, that I should very soon approach it with a palpitating heart, almost fearing to enter; nor could I have guessed the magic influence of that bit of green baize, or the potency of the prompter's half-sheet of note-paper, which in a moment turned friends into foes, and called forth the worst of human passions. A few details are necessary to make my meaning clear to the general reader. When the manager of a theatre selects a new piece, he generally consults with his stage-manager, and casts the characters according to the fitness of each individual member of the company. The old custom was to give

the leading man the leading part, the low comedian the low comedy part, the leading lady the principal female *rôle*, the chambermaid the comic servant, and so on. Each actor or actress was engaged for a particular line of business. Now, it frequently occurred that the heroine of the play was supposed to be sixteen or seventeen years of age. Shakespeare's Juliet "had not seen the change of fourteen years": the leading lady was cast for the part in spite of her age, which, in many instances, was something between sixteen and fifty. The leading man might be on the wrong side of fifty, and fat enough for "Falstaff," but that would not prevent him claiming the part of a slim youth of nineteen. These incongruities all helped the abolition of the stock company seasons. I have seen a scraggy old woman with false teeth play "the fair Ophelia," for no other reason than that she was the leading lady of the theatre. To have asked her to play the Queen of Denmark would have risked making her an enemy for life. I have played Romeo to a Juliet of forty summers, who weighed fifteen stone; and, because the old woman of the company was cast for the Nurse, Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother, was played by a girl of eighteen. My Juliet was so heavy, and the stage rostrums so rickety, that the carpenters had to hold the iron dogs when she mounted the balcony. What was the effect upon the audience? All my passionate speeches went for nothing, and when Juliet said:

> "Thou know'st, the mask of night is on my face;
> Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek,"

there was a suppressed titter in front, for many of the

patrons of the theatre knew that the lady was the mother of a large family.

When the managers attempted to reform the absurd custom of casting pieces according to the various lines of business, the old stagers were furious. Certain actors and actresses threw up their engagements. An ancient leading lady exclaimed in my hearing. "What! play anything but leading business?—never!"

"But," argued the manager, "you have played the lead for many years; you ought to be satisfied with first old women now."

"Oh, you wretch. First old women! I, who have supported all the great actors of my time. Old women—never, sir, never! I will play the lead, if I have to go into a booth. I would rather reign in hell than serve in Heaven."

This heroic speech was followed by a fit of hysterics. Some of the minor members tried their airs and graces when the change came, but when they found that the managers were determined to abolish the old custom, they submitted, though with a bad grace, rather than throw up their engagements. There is a story which has gone the round of the theatres, and is now getting rather stale, but it is too good to pass over.

A provincial actor, finding that he was cast for the part of Rosse in "Macbeth," rushed to the prompter and, pointing to the paper, exclaimed, "Is this your work, sir?"

"I put the cast up, Mr. Ondig."

"I shall *not* play Rosse."

"It doesn't matter to me," said the prompter; "you

had better tell the stage-manager that you won't play the part."

"Where is he? It's an infernal insult, sir."

"Here he comes, Mr. Ondig."

The irate actor stopped the stage-manager, and, repeating his pantomime, exclaimed:

"Sir, I shall *not* play Rosse."

"But you are cast for Rosse."

"Sir, I shall *not* play Rosse."

"All right," said the stage-manager; "there are plenty of mummers who will play Rosse, if you have such an antipathy to the part."

"Did you cast the piece?" asked Ondig.

"I did."

"By whose authority?"

"The manager's."

"Where is he?"

"In the treasury. You had better come with me, and tell him you won't play Rosse."

Ondig followed the stage-manager to the treasury, and exclaimed, as he entered the room:

"Sir, I shall *not* play Rosse."

"Sir, you *will* play Rosse," said the manager.

"Sir, I will *not* play Rosse."

"Then take a fortnight's notice to quit the theatre."

"Sir, I WILL play Rosse." (*Exeunt omnes.*)

The casts of new pieces were usually put up during a performance, and a rush was made for the green-room, directly the prompter was seen going in that direction with a sheet of paper in his hand. If this happened when the act-drop was down, the whole of the company

crowded in front of the call-board. Then came the storm :—

"I never was so insulted in my life. That prompter is a contemptible hound. I shall give in my notice on Saturday," exclaims the heavy man.

"She play the lead! A pale-faced chit who hasn't been five minutes on the stage. I had to learn my business before I was cast for leading parts. What is the stage coming to? All the best parts given to a pack of amateurs." The professional reader will know that this was the spiteful old woman, who made the rising young actress's life a hell upon earth.

"There's some mistake. Oh, yes, it *must* be a mistake to cast me for a utility part. I'll go and speak to the stage-manager at once, and have it altered," exclaims a burly fellow, with a heavy moustache, who soon discovers that there is no mistake, and returns crest-fallen to his dressing-room, to have his revenge by taunting others who are victims of the manager's want of judgment.

"Oh, what's this?" shrieks a scraggy old dame, with a scarlet-tipped nose. "Why, they've cast me for the second old woman, and my line is juvenile lead."

"Oh, it's all right, Miss Splitfig," cries the low comedian, who seldom has cause to grumble at his parts. "It's *the* part of the piece. Lots of fat. You'll play it magnificently. It's a gin-drinking old lodging-house keeper. It will fit you to a T."

Such were the scenes enacted in the green-room whenever a fresh cast was put up by the prompter or stage-manager, until the travelling-company system was

introduced, and each actor or actress engaged for a particular part. It was uphill work for a young leading lady in those days. Her greatest enemy was the first old woman, who had been a leading actress in her time. If they both had to dress in the same room, the cutting remarks of the old lady served as a very effective wet blanket whenever the audience indulged in a little extra applause, or if the manager complimented the young lady upon her intelligent rendition of the character she was playing. These sour old creatures who have had their innings become very dragons of virtue when they have fallen into the sear and yellow leaf, and can no longer bewitch the gay Lotharios of the theatres. Sometimes, when they are not playing in a piece, they will seat themselves in the wings and criticise the acting. If a young actress gets a round of applause, the remarks made by the old women, and the less successful young ones, too, are anything but complimentary. I have often been asked how much I have paid for a call, or whether my washerwoman and her friends were in front. Public favour is very gratifying to a young artiste; but the successful ones of the stage have to run the gauntlet of professional envy and jealousy, which knocks a good deal of the gilt off the gingerbread.

It is astonishing what some actresses will do for a big line in the programme. I once knew a talented leading lady who appeared to be a paragon of all the good qualities attributed to womankind; she was an excellent mother, and few actors had the courage to attempt anything like a familiarity with her. There was one weak point in her armour, however, which was

discovered by an artful acting-manager. She was very ambitious, and she readily sold herself for a big line at the head of the bills, and her name starred in the programme! I have often been amused at the conceit of some actors and actresses who have boasted about their "wonderful acting," just because a clap-trap speech of the author's has elicited the applause of the audience. They could not understand that it was the sentiment of the author the people were applauding, not the genius of the actor. There are certain speeches in certain plays which never fail to obtain a hearty burst of applause, if they are fairly well delivered. Not so long ago I heard an egotistical leading actor boast that *he* had made the plays of a well-known dramatic author: it was an acknowledged fact that the plays had made him.

Many actors judge plays by their own parts. A man who has a good part may be heard lauding the author on every available occasion. Another man who has an unimportant *rôle* in the same piece will talk about the rubbish the public have to put up with. "How can the manager expect such rot to be successful?" He will also lament the decline of the drama, and the scarcity of English playwrights. If the stage-manager is cast by an author for a part he cannot or will not play, he is almost certain to use his influence with the manager of the theatre to have the piece rejected. Such excuses as imperfect construction, weak situations, and too much dialogue serve to cloak the real cause of the stage-manager's disapprobation. Many a good play has been shelved to gratify the whim of a successful actor, who has condemned the whole work because he couldn't

find a part in it to please him. Actors and actresses are, as a rule, excessively narrow-minded; they live in a contracted sphere, called the theatrical world, and few ever step beyond its confines. They talk little else but shop from morning till night. In the green-room, when there are no new casts to discuss, they amuse themselves by criticising other artists behind their backs. When Mrs. Langtry first joined the profession, the scandal-mongers had a fine time of it.

It was the unanimous opinion of the profession that the lady could not act a bit. She was an insipid amateur, who had been thrust upon the stage to gratify some great aristocrat. What was the theatrical profession coming to, when Society beauties could step from the drawing-room to the stage, and relieve the treasury of a hundred pounds sterling every week?

When some of the charitable ladies and gentlemen were asked if they had seen Mrs. Langtry act, the reply was: "No, we have something better to do than waste our time by witnessing such lamentable exhibitions;" or "It makes us mad enough to hear about her," "We should feel inclined to hiss her off the stage," &c., &c. Now, as it happened, Mrs. Langtry possessed exceptional talent for a novice. If her detractors had only taken the trouble to see one of her "exhibitions" before they condemned her, they would have been obliged to acknowledge that the lady was anything but an insipid amateur. At the present time, Mrs. Langtry is recognised by all competent dramatic critics as an accomplished leading *comédienne;* and if she were not Mrs. Langtry, but only plain Miss Robinson or Miss

Jones, she could command a salary of twenty or twenty-five pounds a week. The *gaucherie* that betrays the novice has disappeared with practice, and she is now able to take her position with the leading actresses of the British stage. That able dramatic critic, Mr. Henry Labouchere, who never pens a line about what he does not thoroughly understand, years ago predicted a great future for the beautiful and refined *comédienne*, whose rapid advancement has engendered so much envy and hatred amongst the scandal-mongers of the profession.

The green-rooms of provincial theatres are sometimes invaded by the supers and the ballet ladies. The members of the company strongly object to the admission of the subordinates of the theatre into their school for scandal, and, whenever a ballet girl is caught admiring herself at the green-room mirror, an indignant appeal is generally made by one of the ladies of the company to the prompter or stage-manager, which results in the expulsion of the intruder. These feuds lead to difficulties which are not easily overcome. An irate ballet girl will resent the insult, as she calls it, and loudly assert that she is as good as any actress in the theatre.

The dressing-rooms in many theatres are seldom fit for the reception of any higher animal than the pig. The ordinary furniture, as a rule, consists of a few old chairs, and some shelving, upon which the actors place their boxes and dressing-cases. Five or six men are sometimes expected to dress in one small room. An actor, in a letter to the Editor of the *Era*, dated Sept. 5, 1885, complains that thirteen men were thrust like rats into a room at

the top of a sort of loft ladder leading from the stage of a "Theatre Royal" in the provinces. Great attention is paid to the front of the house, but few managers study the comforts of the members of the company. Some of the most showily-decorated theatres are sadly deficient in accommodation behind the scenes. The green-room is frequently given up to the leading actor or actress for a dressing-room; and when this is done the rest of the company have to wander about the wings, or else remain in the dressing-rooms until they are called for their scene. In a few theatres the dressing-rooms are up in the flies, where the heat is insufferable; and in others ladies and gentlemen have to dress in damp rooms underneath the stage, where various species of fungi flourish, and where the seeds of pulmonary diseases are sown.

Travelling companies have to put up with all manner of inconveniences. I was once in a theatre for a week where I had to dress in the cellar, all amongst the rats; the only dressing-rooms in the place were given to the ladies. In another place the company dressed in the wings. At some of the modern theatres the dressing-room accommodation is very good indeed, but comfort behind the scenes is the exception, not the rule. Young actors sometimes equip themselves with nice dressing-cases containing all the articles necessary for the theatrical toilet, including a good looking-glass, but they are seldom allowed to use their own property. There are plenty of actors who are never guilty of buying a pennyworth of chalk or an ounce of colour. They always sponge upon others, taking a bit of carmine from one, a morsel of chalk from another,

or borrowing the looking-glass and hare's foot, and instead of returning these articles to the rightful owner they pass them on to another gentleman who scorns to waste his money in such trifles. A good many years ago there was an actor in the north of England who possessed a handsome dressing-case. Whenever he opened his box, the rest of the company swarmed round it and helped themselves to its contents. Instead of thanking him for his liberality, they christened him "Dressing-case Fletcher," and by that name he is known to this day. Wigs too are often borrowed by wigless actors, and frequently stretched out of their proper shape if the heads of the borrowers are bigger than those of the owners. It is most annoying on the first night of a new piece, when one ought to be as free as possible from all sources of irritation, to be bothered with such questions as the following:—

"I say, old fellow, lend us your Indian ink."

"Have you got a bit of slap (colour) to give me?"

"You don't mind lending me that fair dress wig for this piece, do you?"

"Hang it all, I've come away without my Dundreary whiskers. Lend me yours, laddie, they're exactly the same as mine."

"You're not using your glass for a minute, are you?"

All these little annoyances tend to increase the nervousness consequent upon fresh study.

If each actor had a dressing-room to himself, he could bolt the door upon the sponges, who spend more in alcohol in one month than would keep them well supplied with toilet accessories for a whole year.

CHAPTER V.

STAGE AND ACTING-MANAGERS.

Stage-managers and their Qualifications—The Bully—John Coleman as a Stage-director—The Vacillating Stage-manager—A Scene at a Rehearsal—The Prompter and his Multifarious Duties—The Acting-manager—"Dead Heads"—An Application to the Gaiety Manager for Orders — Mr. John Hollingshead's Reply — Paper Audiences—The Abuse of the Order System—Actors Detest "Dead Heads" — Theatrical Lodging-house Keepers—Theatrical Barracks—Salaries of Acting-managers.

FEW men are fitted for the office of stage-manager, which is the most unthankful post in a theatre. A good stage-director must be a strict disciplinarian, with a firm will and an unchangeable mind. He must be thoroughly versed in the mechanism of the stage, and capable of ruling with a rod of iron.

If he is invested with full authority, he ought not to allow any interference; his will must be law, or disorder will be the inevitable result. He ought never to overlook an act of insubordination, and, above all, his language should be free from oaths or slangy expressions. I have met with stage-managers who used the foulest language; they could not be emphatic without using low adjectives, and they believed that it was impossible to maintain order without firing volley after volley of curses at the supers and ballet during the rehearsal of a new production. I have seen so many

stage-managers, good, bad, and indifferent, at rehearsals, and directing the stage at night, that I think I ought to be capable of expressing an opinion. I have observed the effects of the bullying directors upon young actors. Instead of making the novices do better, they have frightened the words and the business out of their heads.

The effect of the curses upon the supers and ballet has been to excite derision or contempt—respect, never.

Mr. John Coleman is one of the best, if not *the* best, stage-managers I have met. His presence alone commands attention; and, when he wants to be emphatic, his vocabulary contains expressions forcible enough to call to order the most unruly man or woman in the theatre. A stage-manager can be firm without acting the bully, and gentlemanly without weakening his authority.

There are some stage-managers who have not the courage to say "no," when an officious actor suggests an alteration in the business of a piece. The stage-director who vacillates is lost. The moment he hesitates, his authority vanishes; each member of the company makes a suggestion, and the play is not properly rehearsed.

"Excuse me," one actor will exclaim, "I have always seen the business of this scene done in this way. I meet the heavy man, who struggles with me; I throw him into the left corner, and, as I am rushing off, L.U.E., I meet——."

"You will allow *me* to know," interrupts the leading man. "I have played in the piece scores of times, and I have always seen the heavy man thrown into the right corner, and——"

"Now, you are both wrong," says the leading lady,

coming forward. "The heavy man is thrown in the centre of the stage, not into a corner. Isn't that the correct business, Mr. Stage-manager?"

The vacillating stage-manager is now so fogged that he doesn't know what he is doing, or where he is at the moment. As he does not reply, the lady snatches the book from his hand, and triumphantly exclaims, "There! I knew I was right."

"I don't care what the book says," growls the leading man, "I have always seen him thrown into the right corner."

"But the book says—— "

"I don't care about the book, madam!"

"Do you want to teach me my business?"

"Oh, if you know so much about it, sir, you had better rehearse the piece yourself."

"Now, who *is* the stage-manager?" asks the heavy man; "I have a particular appointment this afternoon, and I don't want to be kept here all day."

By this time the stage-manager has pulled himself together a bit, and says, "We'll rehearse the situation according to the book, ladies and gentlemen. Now, do clear the stage, please, and let us get on."

The mutineers scowl at each other, and the rehearsal is allowed to proceed until another difficulty is discussed.

Lazy stage-managers shift the greater portion of their responsibility from their own shoulders to those of the unfortunate prompter, who is generally the scape-goat and the hardest-worked man in a theatre. The prompter is the first to enter the building in the morning, and the last to leave it at night. Amateurs and others entertain

mistaken notions about the duties of a prompter in a proper theatre, therefore I will explain them. It is the prompter's duty to be present at all rehearsals, and to act as deputy in the stage-manager's absence. The scene-plot, describing the various scenes and their position in the play, the flyman's plot, the gasman's plot, the property plot, containing a list of all the properties (accessories), stage and hand, which are used in the piece, are carefully compiled by the prompter, who is generally held responsible for errors, although the stage-manager ought to check the plots before they are issued. In the absence of the leader of the orchestra the prompter is asked to copy out the music cues, and he is often expected to write out a list of the costumes required for the guidance of the wardrobe mistress. He is also expected to look after the supers and extras. At night the prompter is seldom to be found in the prompt-box following the play and prompting the company. Amateur artistes may require his services at night, but professionals rarely want "the word," and if they did they would seldom get it.

The first night or two of a new piece the prompter may follow the dialogue, but he generally finds enough to do to keep the supers in order, send the call-boy on his errands, ring in the orchestra, see to the setting of the stage and the distribution of the properties, ring up the curtain, work the rain-box, or agitate the thunder, attend to knocks and bells, pistol or gun-shots, crashes, ringing down, shaking the act-drop to get up a call, copying casts, putting up calls for rehearsals, imploring leading actors and actresses to hasten their

toilet, and not keep the drop down too long; bullying the scene-shifters, and hurrying-up the property-men. For these multifarious duties he gets plenty of kicks, but very few halfpence. In some theatres the prompter has to play small parts as well as to attend to his own business.

The acting-manager has nothing whatever to do with acting. He is usually to be found sauntering about the front of the house at night with his hands in his pockets. He is noted for his liberal display of shirt front and cuffs. Many persons imagine that he has nothing to do but walk about in evening dress and write orders for the stalls and boxes. His duties, however, are as important as they are arduous. They comprise the entire management of the front of the house. The money and check-takers are under his control, and he is expected to watch them in order that they may not pass in their friends or take money without duly accounting for it. He has to receive the returns from all parts of the house, and make up two sets of accounts each evening, one for the author (if the piece is payable) and the other for the lessee. He takes charge of the receipts, pays the money into the bank, and is responsible for the accounts of the box book-keeper. All the tradesmen's bills have to be submitted to and checked by the acting-manager. He has to compile the advertisements, work the press, file the critiques, extract the tit-bits for the puffing advertisements, settle all accounts, pay the salaries of the company and the wages of all the persons employed in the theatre. When he takes his walks abroad, he is expected to keep his eyes open to see if the bill-poster has done his work efficiently, and when

the business is bad he has to distribute the paper, which is no easy task in London. Every morning, on his arrival at the theatre, the stage door-keeper hands him a huge bundle of letters, the majority of which are from members of the "Dead Head" fraternity, who write for orders at all times and seasons whether the business is good or bad. Some people beg for free admissions without offering the least excuse for trying to avoid payment. Acting-managers can understand tradesmen who exhibit theatrical bills asking for orders, but why city clerks or drapers assistants' should expect to be supplied with free admissions is a riddle more difficult to unravel than the famous puzzle of the sphinx. I have heard young fellows who never did a favour for a theatrical manager in their lives boast that they seldom paid to see a play; they could always get plenty of orders. Some years ago one of the assistants employed at a large silk-mercer's establishment in London wrote to Mr. Hollingshead, the manager of the Gaiety Theatre, asking him for a few orders for the boxes, which should be used by well-dressed young ladies who would improve the appearance of the front of his theatre by their presence. In reply, Mr. Hollingshead stated that if the silk-mercer would send him some good silk dresses he would take care that they were worn by ladies who would doubtless set them off to the best advantage. When a piece is a failure, it is the duty of the acting-manager to avoid "a beggarly array of empty benches" by issuing plenty of paper; but it is a difficult matter to fill the dress-circle and stall-seats with the right sort of people. Whenever I visit the front of a theatre, I can

pick out the paper at a glance. "Dead Heads" never dress properly. Morning coats and pot hats, or black frock coats and white ties, may be seen in the stalls; plain stuff dresses and scarlet opera cloaks in the dress-circle—people who, if they had paid, would have made their way to the pit or gallery. An acquaintance of mine not long ago sat next to his friend's groom in the stalls at one of the London theatres. The order was evidently given to the master, who handed it to his groom. "Dead Heads" object to pay for programmes. They prefer the houses where no fees are levied. Actors detest paper audiences. "Dead Heads" are more exacting than people who pay. They are most chary with their applause, and some of them believe they are patronising the management by honouring the theatre with their presence.

In some country towns orders are almost as good as money. At one place the acting-manager will obtain the loan of a suite of furniture for a couple of free admissions. At another, seats in the boxes will be exchanged for crockery. There are, however, a number of towns in England and Scotland where very few properties can be obtained without money; these are the places where mushroom managers have swindled all the tradespeople, and walked off with the articles they have borrowed. I have known acting-managers of travelling companies, who have obtained lodgings in advance for the principal artistes, and thus saved a deal of hunting for apartments on the arrival of the company. Theatrical lodging-house keepers should be avoided by young actors, who want to live cheaply. The barracks, as these places are called,

are celebrated for ridiculously high rents, bad cooking, and landladies who have a weakness for tasting their lodgers' spirits. Many of the provincial lodging-house keepers relate doleful stories of actors who have done them, but they invariably make up their losses by fleecing those who can and will pay. In a theatrical "barrack" in the midland counties, I found the following items on one week's bill:—Pepper, 3d.; salt, 2d.; cruet, 6d.

In many places the item "cruet" appeared on the bill, and I had got used to the imposition; but to be debited in one week with enough salt and pepper to last a single man more than half a year was coming it a little too strong. In Scotland the landladies are very inquisitive, and not particularly polite. An actor and his wife, members of a travelling company, presented themselves at the door of a theatrical barrack in Edinburgh a few years ago, and asked if they could be accommodated with apartments. The landlady took stock of them, and exclaimed, "Are you man and wife, or is it the usual theatrical arrangement?"

The salaries of acting-managers average from £2 to £10 a week. One gentleman in London was lately paid as much as £25 per week for acting-management; but his duties included the arranging of touring companies as well as the business connected with his head-quarters. At West-end theatres the salaries average from £6 to £10 per week. A good acting-manager is seldom out of an engagement; he is worth his money to the lessee, and, if he makes himself popular with the public, he can always depend upon a good benefit once a year.

CHAPTER VI.

Managers and Manageresses.

The Mushroom or Swindling Manager—The Aristocratic Manager and the Legitimate Manager—How Provincial Theatres are Opened by Swindlers—The Ghost does not Walk—The Missing Manager—Decamped with all the Receipts — The Murderer Lefroy as a Theatrical Manager—The Aristocratic Manager—A Noble Lord and His Drunken Mistress—The First Night of a new Play—Pensioned on a Thousand a Year—Legitimate Managers—The Greek Merchants and the Actresses—Swells behind the Scenes—Incompetency and Vice in Sealskin *versus* Talent in a Plain Dress—A Cheap Jack turned Theatrical Manager—The Story of the Wild Man who worried a Sheep—Good Managers—Mr. Wilson Barrett—The National Theatre—Drury Lane Degenerating—Theatres Expensive Luxuries.

MANAGERS of theatres ought to be classed under three separate headings. First, there is the mushroom manager, whose sole object is swindling; then there is the aristocrat manager, who takes a theatre to gratify the vanity of his mistress; and the legitimate manager, who does his best to improve the stage and make his own fortune. The mushroom manager generally confines his depredations to the provinces, and he shows a strong partiality for bad theatrical towns, where the established temple of the drama may be had on any terms. His method of working is as follows:—He pays

a visit to a small town of about 30,000 inhabitants, waits upon the owner of the theatre, and offers to open the house with a "powerful company," and to hand over each night a fifth of the gross receipts for rent. The landlord accepts the offer. He is certain to get something for his share, and that will be better than keeping the theatre closed. The manager next sends half-a-crown to the *Epoch* or *The Footlights*, with an advertisement for an entire dramatic company to open in a week or a fortnight's time. When he has selected his company, he goes in search of a local printer, and orders the bills. The actors and actresses arrive, the rehearsals commence, and all is ready for the opening night. There is usually some difficulty about the gas. Gas companies are never swindled. They demand five or six pounds' deposit, enough to cover the cost of a week's consumption, before the gas is turned on. If the manager cannot find the ready money, he may be able to induce the owner of the theatre to be security for the gas, and the quantity consumed each night is noted and paid for out of the receipts.

The landlord either takes the money himself or finds his own money-taker, and the manager looks after the check-takers. At the close of the performance every evening, the owner of the theatre deducts his rent, and the gas account if the deposit has not been paid, and hands over the balance to the manager, who is supposed to pay the band, stage-carpenter, property-man, scene-shifters, cleaner, check-takers, supers, extra girls, and the ladies and gentlemen of the company.

When the gross receipts amount to twenty-five or thirty shillings, there is very little left for the treasury. At twelve o'clock on the first Saturday after the opening of the theatre, the manager is met by the bill-poster, the leader of the orchestra, and the property-man with his bill for the articles he has had to purchase for the pieces which have been represented during the week. The band must be paid, or they will be certain to strike. The bill-poster's account ought to be settled to prevent him injuring the Saturday night's business, and the stagemen ought to have their money to insure their attendance in the evening. The actors and actresses are always the last consideration. They are put off until night. The excuse is that, in consequence of the great expense attending the opening of the theatre, there is not *quite* enough money in the treasury to pay the whole of the company; will the ladies and gentlemen be good enough to wait until after the performance? Sometimes the impudent scoundrel will put up a notice to the effect that all salaries will be paid after the curtain falls, to insure sobriety on the Saturday evening. The excuses made by swindling managers would fill a long list. The rogues seldom appear at a loss for a plausible story when it is time for the "ghost to walk," as the payment of salaries is usually called in the technical language of the profession. Many of the actors have come long distances, and their landladies will expect their bills paid in the afternoon. There is no alternative but to wait until after the Saturday night's performance, so landladies have to be put off until Sunday morning.

It sometimes happens that the manager has not

enough money to pay the band at the usual time. In that case there is generally an adjournment to a neighbouring beershop, and a delegate is appointed to wait upon the manager to inform him that there will be no overture until the members of the orchestra are paid. If there is the chance of a good house, the musicians may agree to wait until the end of the first act; but, if the money is not then forthcoming, they will walk out of the orchestra, and leave the piece to be finished, minus overtures and incidental music. It is no unusual occurrence for an orchestra to strike in the middle of a performance. In very bad theatrical towns the musicians have to be paid nightly; they will not trust any unknown manager for a whole week. After the performance the money handed over by the landlord is shared amongst the company, the manager taking care to deduct enough for his current expenses. The leading man, who has been engaged at a salary of £4 a week, will receive ten or twelve shillings, while some of the utility people will have to be satisfied with three or four shillings for their week's work. What are the victims of this mushroom manager to do? They cannot pay for their board and lodging. They have no private resources, and it is probable that they pawned a portion of their luggage with the railway company to obtain the tickets which brought them to the town. They can only consent to go on for another week, vainly hoping that a bespeak will pull up the business and enable the manager to pay them their arrears of wages.

The landlord of the theatre is quite willing to let his house for as long as the manager likes to take it on the

same terms. A new bill is issued, and the performances are continued. The patronage is as bad, or perhaps worse, than it was the previous week. The mayor's bespeak turns out a wretched failure. The people in the town know well enough that his worship will not honour the theatre with his presence. He has merely given his name to get rid of the manager, who worries him as he is leaving his house to preside at an important magisterial examination at the town-hall. The play selected for the bespeak does not please the patrons of the pit and gallery. The mayor and his friends do not come to enjoy it, and the great night of the week turns out a dire failure.

The next day the ghost declines to walk. There are "wars and rumours of wars." The leading man, who has picked up with a few public-house friends, threatens vengeance if he does not get the whole of the money due to him. After the Saturday night's performance other members of the company have consultations at the street corners, and reports reach the ears of the manager which make him feel uncomfortable. He returns to his lodgings, and puts a few figures upon a piece of paper. By the aid of two or three sums of compound addition and division, he finds that the house would have to be filled to its utmost capacity to enable him to settle all his claims. He sees a way out of the difficulty, and consults his time-table. His mind is made up, and he spends the rest of the afternoon in packing his portmanteau and making a journey to the cloak-room of the railway-station. At seven o'clock the curtain rises, the actors are delighted to notice an improvement in the

business. This is partly owing to a few large posters which have been painted by the juvenile man, who combines scene-painting with acting.

At half-past eight the manager asks the landlord for a settlement. He has to pay his company before the second piece begins to keep them quiet. The rent is deducted, and the cash handed over to the manager.

At eleven o'clock the curtain falls, and there is a quick rush to the little den which serves as a treasury. The door is closed. After knocking two or three times, the leading man, with an oath, kicks open the door; the gas is turned up, but there is no one inside. A super is despatched to the nearest public-house. He soon returns without any clue to the whereabouts of the missing manager. One of the actors rushes off to his lodgings. The landlady is all smiles—she has been paid her bill; but she knows nothing of her lodger's movements. His bed-room is searched; the portmanteau is gone. The actor returns to the theatre with the maddening news. The company, uttering curses and lamentations, flock to the railway-stations, there to learn the truth. The manager left by the 9.15 train for Mugby Junction. He is now—goodness knows where!

This is not an exaggerated picture. There is a man who is now in the United States who crossed the Atlantic when this country was too hot to hold him. To my own knowledge, he bolted with the receipts from four small towns, leaving the members of his company in each place penniless, and face to face with their irate landladies. The reader will, doubtless, wonder why these rascally managers are not punished by the law. Applications

have been made to country magistrates by victimised actors, who have always been informed that their only remedy is through the County Court; hence the scoundrels invariably get off scot-free. There certainly ought to be some way of preventing such shame-faced robberies. If a bill were passed to compel managers of theatres to prove to the authorities of a town that they possessed sufficient capital to pay the rent of the theatre and the salaries of the company for a certain term, the swindlers would be driven out of the field, and provincial towns would not be disgraced by the scenes which are so frequently enacted when the theatres are opened by mushroom managers. When a disreputable actor, either through drink or roguery, fails to obtain remunerative engagements, he becomes a manager and opens a theatre in the manner I have already described. Seven or eight years ago a dramatic company was advertised for in a theatrical journal. The advertisement appeared genuine, and some experienced actors and actresses sent in applications for the vacancies. A friend of mine, a leading lady of repute, offered her services at ten guineas a week. By the next post she received an engagement-form for signature. The fact of the advertiser accepting the terms so readily aroused her suspicions. She said to herself, "I must know something about this man before I sign the agreement." She wrote to the manager, who gave his address at a house in Edith-road, Peckham. The lady requested the advertiser to meet her at her agent's to answer a few questions before she finally settled to accept the engagement. She did not get any reply to her letter, and she

naturally concluded that the affair was a swindle. The advertiser succeeded in getting a company together, including an acting-manager, who met the ladies and gentlemen at a town in the west of England. The plays were rehearsed, but they were never performed. The manager did not appear, and the members of the company, who had travelled from various parts of the country, had to pay their railway expenses and satisfy their landladies. The name of the absent manager was LEFROY, THE NOTORIOUS MURDERER, who was executed at Lewes Gaol for the assassination of Mr. Gould on the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway.

The aristocratic manager is generally a fast peer, or the dissipated heir to a title. The noble lord becomes infatuated with an actress who has little or no talent. She is tired of going on for small parts. She is burning to play the lead. She tells her noble paramour that she only wants the chance which, through the blindness of managers, she can never get. The only way in which his lordship can assist her is to take a theatre for her, and have it licensed in her name. When once she becomes a manageress, she can gratify her ambition and play whatever she likes. The artful woman coaxes her friend into the belief that his lady-love is a very ill-used woman. Ultimately, he yields to her entreaties, and gives her permission to take a theatre, where she can punish the public with her attempts at fine acting. Cheques are written by his lordship for large sums; the theatre engaged; a company selected, the most insignificant member of which can act better than the manageress; performances are given;

bad business follows, as a matter of course: but that does not trouble the lady; she knows where to go when the treasury is empty. This sort of management continues so long as the noble lord will pay the piper. When the losses require several figures to express them, and the society of the manageress begins to pall upon his lordship, he orders the theatre to be closed, and pensions off his mistress with a good round sum. Strange to relate, she now finds the legitimate managers ready to receive her with open arms and offers of big salaries for the future. It is a curious fact that the women who meet with wealthy men, ready to spend thousands of pounds in order to advance them in their profession, invariably abuse their chances. A few years ago, a theatre was taken by a noble lord for an actress, who was drunk on the first night of a new play. She appeared on the stage with one blue and one red boot. The rich manager was often to be seen in the front of the house, his face engraved with his mistress's nails. Champagne was the favourite beverage of this ornament of the profession, who, after disgusting the public and damaging the reputation of the theatre, retired upon a handsome pension.

Although I have styled the third class of managers as "legitimate," it must not be supposed that every manager is strictly legitimate in his method of conducting the business of his theatre. I use the word legitimate to distinguish the manager who takes out the licence in his own name, and works for himself without intending to pay less than twenty shillings in the pound, from the swindler and the aristocratic manager.

There are lessees who pay their way, and make plenty of money into the bargain, in anything but a strictly legitimate manner. Some managers encourage swells behind the scenes. I recollect the time when a nobleman had only to present his card to the stage door-keeper to gain him access to any part of the theatre. Young lords—or stage-door loungers, as they were sometimes called—were permitted to hang about the wings, and attempt familiarities with the female artistes.

Not so many years ago I was at a theatre where Greek merchants used to congregate. They were even allowed to be present at rehearsals. The manager did not care for any ladies who would not receive the attentions of the sallow-faced gentlemen. A friend of mine, a charming little actress, complained to me about the lessee, who had bullied her for refusing some article of jewellery which had been sent to her by a young Greek. In defence, she told the manager that she was engaged to be married.

"What does that matter? You ought to study the interests of the management."

"But it would be wrong for me to take the presents under the circumstances."

"You are not fit for the stage, my dear; you are over-scrupulous. If you refuse the presents, you will drive the fellow and his friends from the theatre. Take the presents, and promise all sorts of things which can be deferred, if you are so particular, until the end of the season, when you can give him the slip."

The lady indignantly refused to wrong her affianced husband.

There can really be no excuse for permitting the public behind the curtain, and, happily, this is becoming recognized.

I think it was the late Mr. Benjamin Webster who was the first to put a stop to strangers being allowed behind the scenes. Other managers followed his example, and at the present time the majority of London managers refuse to admit "swells" behind during a performance.

There are still two or three theatres where a favoured few are allowed behind the scenes; but these houses depend to a great extent upon the patronage of "mashers" and dissipated aristocrats, who make the theatre a rendezvous, and pay their money merely to gaze upon their mistresses in tights. The managers of these houses do not care to engage plainly-dressed actresses. Talent and virtue in a stuff gown will not suit the *habitués* of their theatres. They prefer incompetency and vice in satin and sealskin. There are a few clever actresses who are seldom in good engagements, because they are not "in the swim." To be in the swim they would have to drive about in a brougham, dress like a duchess, give dinner and supper parties, and encourage the swells. I asked a competent leading actress the other day why she did not apply to the manager of a certain theatre for an engagement. Her reply was, "Because I cannot drive up to the door in a brougham, or find a swell to take a private box every other night."

If a young girl can escape the temptations which beset her when she is surrounded by flatterers who know so well how to play upon the feelings of the weaker

sex, she sometimes falls into the snare set for her by the manager himself. There is an elderly man in this country, formerly the lessee of several provincial theatres, who was notoriously immoral. No young woman was safe under his management. His children are scattered all over the kingdom, and it is doubtful whether he could tell the number of his family if he tried. Compared with this old rake, Brigham Young was an anchorite. He used to boast that he did not care to engage married actresses, who always wanted their husbands tied to their apron-strings. Whenever he opened his theatre, he had his office, or treasury, well furnished and liberally supplied with wine. In this room he used to entertain the pretty girls belonging to his company.

He had always an excuse ready when he wanted a private interview with a young lady. Sometimes it was to ask them if they felt competent to play a certain part; or he wanted to consult with an actress about her dress for the forthcoming burlesque. When they entered his snug office, the wine was brought out, and he assumed his most plausible manner. He boasted that many times he had

> "Let in a maid that out a maid
> Never departed more."

This old villain was not at all particular about the social status of his victims. Leading actresses, utility ladies, ballet or extra ladies, were all the same to him. Some years ago, he had the management of a theatre, where he carried on his games to such an extent that the proprietors of the building paid him a large sum of

money to get rid of him. They refused to allow their theatre to be used for such immoral purposes.

Some managers are well-educated men. A few are scholars and gentlemen, while some are very illiterate men, who have risen from the lowest ranks of society by their own unaided exertions. I was once invited to a champagne supper, which was given to about half a dozen professional gentlemen, by the manager of three provincial theatres. Mr. Bell, the lucky lessee of all the places of amusement in the town of Seaboro', began his career as a caravan boy. He travelled with a small circus. The proprietor had not sufficient sleeping accommodation for young Bell, who had to turn in with the dog upon some straw underneath the "living carriage." When he was old enough to start business for himself, he selected the "handselling" profession, and soon became a very smart Cheap Jack. One day, while he was in London buying some goods, he met in the neighbourhood of the Docks a wretched-looking Lascar, who was seeking for a ship, but couldn't get one. Bell, who always had a partiality for a showman's life, suddenly thought that it would be a grand idea to exhibit a wild man in the country towns and villages. Here was a chance. The miserable Lascar would, with very little disguise, make a splendid wild man. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, Bell invited the black man to accompany him to a public-house in Ratcliff Highway, where, after giving him something to eat and drink, he made his strange proposal. The Lascar, who was almost starving, readily assented, and the next thing was to have an old "living carriage" converted into a cage for

the wild man. "Ah," said Bell, as he re-filled our glasses with sparkling Moët, "it was a nobby show. The side of the carriage was taken out, and replaced with strong iron bars, which the wild man used to shake when he was teased by the boys at country fairs. The inside was painted white, to show the darkey to the best advantage, and the bottom of the caravan was covered with clean straw. I gave up handselling that year, and turned all my attention to the wild man. We always travelled in the night, for the nigger could not leave his cage in the day-time. We used to dress him up in a long drab coat and a chimney-pot hat when we were moving from one town to another, so nobody suspected that the wild man ever left his cage. We did splendid business the first year. The rat-eating fake wasn't in it with our show. When the tent which we used to pitch over the caravan was full, the curtain was drawn aside, and the darkey began his performance. He danced about the cage, kicked up the straw, and made a noise something like a cross between a pig and a donkey. Whenever the people got too near the cage, he showed his teeth and growled. The second year we didn't draw such good business; and our receipts dropped to less than it took to keep the old horse. I was well-nigh broke, when I thought of a rig that would fill our pockets again. We arrived at a town in the eastern counties at three in the morning. 'Jup,' I said to the Lascar, opening the cage-door, 'come along with me.' 'What for?' cried Jup, who could cackle as well as any of us. 'You shut up,' I said, 'or you'll queer my pitch. Take off your big over-coat, and

come along with me, dressed in your native costume—feathers.' I armed myself with a knife, and we went into a field that belonged to a farmer close by. Jup thought I was going to murder him when he caught sight of the knife. He fell on his knees and began to blubber out, 'I've never blowed the gaff; and I've served you well.'

"'Shut up, you black idiot, and listen to me, or I *will* settle you. Do you see them sheep?'

"'Ye-e-s.'

"'Well, get up and help me to kill one, and you shall have a jolly good supper.'

"Jup, who like myself, was deuced hungry, was on his feet in a moment.

"We ran round that field three times before we laid hold of a sheep. When we did catch the mutton, I knifed it without asking the sheep's permission. When the animal was dead, Jup and I mutilated it, and we carried off a good lump for supper.

"The next morning, I called at the police station, and asked to see the inspector. When he came in, I said:—

"'I'm sorry to trouble you, sir, but I'm in a bit of a difficulty. I came into the town with my show at three o'clock this morning; and, just as I opened the cage to feed my wild man, the savage thing knocked me down with an iron bar and escaped. I lay on the ground stunned for an hour or more. When I came to, I went off, with a long rope with a noose at the end of it, to catch my gentleman. I found him in a field devouring a sheep he had killed.'

"'Did you catch him again?' asked the inspector, who looked a bit scared.

"'Oh, yes, bless you; he was so busy drinking the blood of the sheep that he didn't see me. I flung the noose round him, and dragged him back to his cage; and didn't he holler!'

"'Well, my man, what do you want me to do? You'll have to pay for that sheep, I reckon.'

"'Of course, I will, sir, I'm an honest man. I'll pay whatever the farmer says it is worth, but I thought your influence might get me off cheap.'

"The inspector, who liked flattery as well as any of us, offered to go with me to the farm-house.

"The farmer listened to our story, and sent for a butcher, who bought the sheep at a reduced price. The difference I had to pay, and the farmer promised to trust me until night.

"It got all over the town that my wild man had broken loose and worried a sheep.

"The show was crammed that evening and all the following day. The news got before us to the next town, and we did great business for the rest of the week."

I now turn with pleasure to the managers who have proved to the profession and the public that the theatre can be made an institution worthy of the patronage of respectable and high-minded persons. In the provinces, there are several pattern managers, including J. R. Newcombe, of Plymouth, who moves in the best circles; James Elphinstone, of Hanley, who is an honest, straightforward man of business, and a kind friend to those who serve him faithfully; the Chutes, of Bristol; Messrs. Howard and Wyndham, of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and

Newcastle; Mr. J. F. Warden, of Belfast; Mr. Michael Gunn, of Dublin; Mrs. Charles Rice, of Bradford; Mrs. Nye Chart, of Brighton; Mrs. Saker, of Liverpool; and Mr. Mercer Simpson, of Birmingham. In London, there is Mr. Henry Irving at the Lyceum, whose splendid management will again be mentioned in these pages; Mr. S. B. Bancroft; Messrs. Hare and Kendal at the St. James's; Messrs. Gatti at the Adelphi; Mr. Wilson Barrett at the Princess's Theatre; Mr. J. L. Toole, and others. It would be impossible to praise too highly the work of Mr. Barrett, whose managerial career from the beginning has been remarkable in more ways than one. He is a gentleman who aims at perfection. His house in Oxford Street is as well conducted behind the scenes as it is in front. I do not believe that this model manager would allow his own brother to pass the stage-door if he were not engaged at the theatre. The acting management was, until lately, in the hands of Mr. Henry Herman, who claims to be one of the authors of "The Silver King," and Mr. Knox Furtado. Now, the direction of the front of the house is intrusted to Mr. J. H. Cobbe, who is assisted by Mr. Furtado. How these gentlemen conduct their business, any patron of the drama will soon discover by paying a visit to this handsome theatre. The attendants are forbidden to accept gratuities on pain of instant dismissal. Every part of the house is beautifully clean; the entrances and lobbies are decorated with interesting pictures. Nicely-printed programmes are given away; the music is good; the scenery and properties are always in character with

the play; and the acting, particularly in modern dramas, is excellent.

Mr. Wilson Barrett is as popular as an actor as he is fortunate as a manager. Like Mr. Henry Irving, he has done his best to restore the classic drama to the stage; but I am afraid that London will not support two houses devoted to the tragic muse. If Mr. Barrett is wise, he will stick to modern drama, and encourage native talent. The success of that well-constructed drama, "The Silver King," ought to guide the manager of the Princess's Theatre in the selection of future productions. There is a large building in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden that used to be called the National Theatre, and the actors and actresses who played there were styled Her Majesty's Servants. This fine old house has sadly degenerated. It is still spoken of as the National Theatre; but, if the claptrap productions of late years are to be accepted as fair specimens of the national drama, the decline has indeed come, and the fall of the British stage is in the immediate future. When Mr. Chatterton was the lessee of Drury Lane, he raised the hue-and-cry by producing dramatised versions of the works of Sir Walter Scott. These plays were magnificently mounted and well cast. He would as soon have produced "Sweeney Todd, or the Barber Murderer of Fleet Street," as such dramas as "The Sailor and his Lass" and "A True Story." Mr. Chatterton said that Shakespeare spelt ruin and Byron bankruptcy, but he never tried to recoup himself by pandering to the taste of a gallery audience. In the hands of Mr. Henry Irving or Mr. Wilson

Barrett, old Drury might again be made worthy of the name of National Theatre. Let us hope that the day is not far distant when Drury Lane Theatre will be the recognised home of the legitimate, and the pride of the dramatic profession.

A London theatre is a very expensive luxury. The rent alone represents a good income. The managers of some of the metropolitan theatres pay as much as one hundred pounds a week for rent in advance. Sometimes the front of the house is let for twenty or thirty pounds a week to the refreshment caterer, who frequently sub-lets the cloak-rooms and programmes. The men who sell the programmes are paid from one shilling and sixpence to two shillings and sixpence per night according to their capabilities. It will be understood that the managers who have abolished fees lose a deal of money by their liberality to the public. They also have to pay all the attendants. I have known the bill-poster's account for one week amount to thirty pounds; indeed, I believe that was the weekly contract price for the season. Printing is always a large item. The gas bill, too, is heavy. A manager cannot advertise in the newspapers to any extent under ten pounds a day. Sometimes double that sum is spent on one journal. Theatrical speculators seldom die rich men; and many good managers, who have spent their lives in catering for the public, have ended their days in comparative poverty.

CHAPTER VII.

DRAMATIC AUTHORS.

Modern Playwrights — The Whitechapel Coster on the West-end Stage—Mr. George R. Sims and his Dramas—The Value of a Marriage Certificate—John Bull and the French Stage—Mock Modesty—Suggestive Comedies—"Pink Dominoes"—John Bull in Paris—Shakespeare—La Bibliothèque Dramatique Française—English authors and the French Stage—Sir Walter Scott's Failure as a Dramatist — Lord Tennyson's Plays — The late Lord Lytton—H. J. Byron—Tom Taylor—W. S. Gilbert—Charles Reade at the Theatre; his Method of conducting Rehearsals—Literary Pirates—The Prompter who copied every Drama intrusted to his care — Fees paid to Dramatic Authors.

TWENTY years ago, if an author had presumed to submit to a West-end manager a drama in which the comic characters were Whitechapel Costers, who wore "slap up kicksies, with a double fakement down each side and artful buttons at bottom," and used the lowest East-end slang whenever they opened their mouths, it is more than likely that that bold author would have been advised to take his wares to the Oriental or the Bower Saloon. Managers east of Temple Bar were beginning to give their patrons better fare than casual wards, rags and dirt, ikey costers, moralising bobbies, and scenes resembling pantomime rallies. Stimulated by the success of the Robertsonian comedies, they tried to emulate the founders of the so-called cup-and-saucer

school, by producing modern dramas, in which the languid swell took the place of the "ikey coster," and drawing-rooms, lined with mirrors, adorned the stage, instead of Billingsgate Market or Petticoat Lane on a Sunday morning. What a change time has worked? The West-end managers, who turned up their noble noses at sensational plays, now offer their patrons modernised samples of the old rough-and-tumble melo-drama. The "stage coster," who a quarter of a century ago never travelled west of Temple Bar, may be seen nightly at one or two of our best theatres, and the people who would have been shocked at the idea of spending an evening in the Oriental or Pavilion now applaud and eulogise the class of character and acting that used to be so much admired by the East-end rough. One of the most successful of modern dramatists is Mr. George R. Sims. That gentleman has been lucky enough to meet with managers who have mounted his pieces in magnificent style, and engaged good and popular actors to represent his *dramatis personæ;* but no impartial judge, who knows anything about the stage, can accuse Mr. Sims of much originality. Take, for example, the "Lights o' London." Is there a single creation in that drama? Is there one new situation? There is the old worn-out story of the rightful heir being done out of his inheritance by a scapegrace, who persecutes his rival and spends his money. In the "Last Chance" we have the vicissitudes of another rightful heir, who has to turn out of his ancestral hall to make way for the impostor. The "low cad" appears in this play, and delights the audience with a plentiful supply of concentrated White-

chapel argot. If Mr. Sims can find managers to produce his striking *tableaux*, so much the better for him, and all the worse for art.

I do not blame the author if he finds that it pays better than legitimate work. Mr. Sims caters for the pit and gallery. He invents or reproduces tricky situations, in order to "bring down the house"; but he has yet to produce a powerful drama, full of human interest, in which there is less work for the scene-shifters and more study for the actors.

There is nothing artistic in a series of tableaux strung together merely for the purpose of introducing a number of characters to deliver a few lines of clap-trap in order to elicit the applause of the "gods." It is possible for an author to write a powerful five-act play in five scenes. Big casts and long-scene plots are the sure signs of unskilful dramatic authorship. I have often wondered why writers for the stage attach so much importance to a marriage-certificate. I have seen modern dramas in which murders and all sorts of villany have been concocted merely for the purpose of obtaining a bit of paper which has no intrinsic valve. The heroine of a play is married to a villain, who wishes to destroy the proofs of his marriage. He asks for the certificate; his wife, in a tragic speech, refuses to part with the precious document—threats are in vain; "I will suffer death rather than you shall snatch from my bosom that which will prove to all the world that I am an honest woman." Terrific struggles, ending sometimes in murder or long sea voyages taken to recover what?—a piece of blue paper! Why does it not strike the heroine that the paper she holds so dear is

ONLY A COPY OF THE PARISH REGISTER. She can get another for three-and-sixpence! If it were the original, which, if destroyed, would make her a mistress and her children illegitimate, I could understand the fuss she makes about it; but, while the original is in the safe custody of the parish clerk at the church where the marriage was solemnised, the rows, the struggles, and the great situations are, to my thinking, the very essence of burlesque. In the drama "A True Story," which was produced at Drury Lane a short time back, two sets of characters fought for the possession of marriage-certificates. Even that skilful dramatist, Mr. Dion Boucicault, did not see the absurdity of the "marriage lines situation," for he made Hardress Cregan in the "Colleen Bawn" imperil his soul to gain possession of Eily's certificate. Probably Father Tom did not trouble to enter the marriage in the Parish Register, which will account for his solemn warning to the Colleen Bawn at the end of the first act. It is the fashion nowadays to sneer at the works of Fitzball and other old dramatists, but I question whether greater absurdities than we see in the modern productions are to be found in the works of the playwrights of half a century ago. English people appear shocked at the bare mention of the French stage. How many times have I heard John Bull exclaim, "Ah, what a blessing it is that we can take our daughters to the theatre without fear of contamination. In Paris, I never take either wife or children when I go to the play, the French comedies are so suggestive. Our neighbours across the Channel are so lax in their morals, that a play destitute of indecent speeches and

gestures would not please the French public. Such pieces would never be tolerated in this country." Now, my dear John Bull, I fear you are brimfull of mock modesty. You condemn the French stage and preach about the morality of English dramatists, when you know well enough that for years (excepting Robertson's comedies and the Gilbert-Sullivan successes) more than three-fourths of our modern plays have been adaptations from the French, merely toned down somewhat to suit the English taste, but still sufficiently suggestive. Did you not take your wife and daughters to see "Pink Dominoes"? Was there nothing suggestive in *that* comedy? Did you not enjoy the Cremorne scene, which was broad enough, in all conscience? The moment you found out what the piece was about, did you indignantly leave the theatre, and write a letter to the *Times*? No, you stayed until the curtain fell. You applauded the characters "to the echo," and declared to your wife and daughter, on your road home, that it was the best piece you had ever seen, so good that you must really see it again. It never occurred to you that, if you had been asked to take the female members of your household to witness the *same comedy* at a French theatre, you would have turned up the whites of your eyes—and exclaimed, "Heaven forbid!" but you would have gone to see it yourself, dear old John, and, if a spade had been called an agricultural implement, you would have voted it a deucedly dull play. It has been my painful duty to tell the truth about the stage. It is now my turn to point out the influence of the playgoing public upon the drama. There are plenty of managers

who would be only too glad to encourage native talent and put before their patrons a bill of fare which should be the very concentrated essence of morality; but John Bull, in spite of his long face and his pure-minded notions, is prepared to support plays with another tendency; he is as fond of highly-spiced dramatic fare as his much-maligned neighbour, Jacques Bonhomme. He goes to sleep over or else turns his back on the legitimate, and, although he has a splendidly-bound copy of Shakespeare in his bookcase, he has never opened it since the day he placed it there. His excuses for failing to patronise the works of the immortal poet are rather numerous. Sometimes it is: "Oh, who can stand a tragedy in the dog-days?" or, "When I go to the theatre, I want to be amused, Shakespeare is so gloomy;" "We have no actors nowadays capable of doing justice to the works of the great master—whom by the bye I haven't read. Give me a play that makes one laugh." If he were honest, he would add, "something broad and well sprinkled with *double-entendre*.

Although there is no excuse for the questionable doings behind the scenes, there is a good reason for the production of so many adaptations from the French. They please the British public better than anything else, as Mr. Charles Wyndham can testify, and the nearer they are to the original comedies the greater the success. Managers are what the patrons of the theatre have made them, and, if there is to be a reformation, the public will have to take the initiative. How much English dramatists owe to the French stage is not generally known. A few years ago I had access to about

four thousand French plays. I searched for a good plot for nearly a year, but out of so large a number of pieces I did not meet with one drama, comedy, or vaudeville worth anything that had not already been adapted for the English stage. In "La Bibliothèque Dramatique Française" I found nearly all my old melodramatic friends, besides a number of "original" English farces. This fruitless search of mine for an unused plot proved how thoroughly British authors had ransacked French dramatic literature for plots, incidents, and dialogue. I mention this fact in case some aspiring young playwright may fancy there is still a little ore left in that literary gold mine, "La Bibliothèque Dramatique Française." Few eminent novelists *can* write for the stage. A dramatic author must be well acquainted with the theatre before he can produce successful plays. That is why so many authors collaborate with managers. Well-written dialogue alone will not suffice to draw the public. Many admirably-written pieces have been serious failures, while trashy productions redundant with striking situations have been fairly successful. Sir Walter Scott wrote a charming pastoral poem for the stage, but it had a short life; indeed, it was seldom played out of Edinburgh, and then only on special occasions. The poet laureate, Baron Tennyson, has tried dramatic literature and failed. The only poet of this century who achieved any success as a playwright was the late Lord Lytton, whose "Richelieu," "Money," and "The Lady of Lyons" are excellent specimens of dramatic construction.

Many actors have written good plays. The late H. J. Byron was at one time an actor, at another a manager.

He thoroughly understood the mechanism of the stage, and the art of inventing situations. The late Tom Taylor, although he did not shine as an actor, thoroughly understood the actor's art. His drama, "The Ticket-of-Leave Man," is a fine specimen of skilful construction. I am inclined to believe that the author did not realise the effect of the great situation in the fourth act before it was produced. Tom Taylor originally intended the action of the scene to proceed after Hawkshaw had revealed himself, but the applause was so loud and so prolonged that it was found necessary to lower the act-drop upon the situation. The late Mr. Charles Reade had also a thorough knowledge of stage business. It was his plan to first write the drama and then the novel, in order to protect the rights of dramatisation. All Mr. Reade's plays are well constructed. There are one or two incongruities in "Never Too Late to Mend," but that drama has stood the test of time; and it is always being played in the provinces, and occasionally in London.

Actors object to authors at rehearsal, because playwrights sometimes suppose they know how their creations ought to be represented better than the ladies and gentlemen who are intrusted with the characters. It is considered great presumption on the part of an author to want to teach a company how to act. Some authors will have the characters in their plays represented after their own ideas, and object to any suggestions offered by the actors and actresses who are rehearsing the parts. Of course, an author *ought* to know how his pieces should be acted; but occasionally an experienced actor

has it in his power to introduce effective business which tends to improve and strengthen the character he is representing. Mr. W. S. Gilbert is a martinet at rehearsal; the late Mr. Charles Reade always superintended the production of his dramas. He used to spend day after day in the theatre, giving directions to the stage-carpenter, property-master, and scenic artist, as well as rehearsing the piece, going through important scenes over and over again, until he considered them fit for representation.

It was most amusing to see the distinguished novelist showing the ballet-girls how to do their steps in a country-dance, or trying to sing a stave of a ballad, when the actor did not render the song with due effect. Sometimes a scene working up to a climax would be carefully rehearsed by the company, Mr. Reade sitting at the prompt-table, watching the action and intently following the dialogue, with the manuscript of the play in his hand. When the scene was over, and the actors waiting for a word of praise from the author, Mr. Reade would put down the MS., and calmly exclaim, "Not a bit like it! Now, I'll show you how to work up this situation." He would then speak the lines, and go through all the business himself. When he had finished, he would sit down, and say, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we'll have this scene over again—and please do it *my* way.

Mr. Reade was the deadly enemy of all dramatic pirates. Whenever he received information that a piratical version of one of his dramas was being played, he could not rest until he had confiscated the stolen copy

and punished the persons who preferred stealing the brains of others to using their own. He was not to be blamed for standing up for his rights. If authors were not to look well after their property, they would derive very little benefit from their own works. There are plenty of small managers and actors who are always on the *qui-vive* for novelties. It would be against their established principles to pay authors' fees, so they deliberately steal copies of successful plays, or, after witnessing two or three representations of a new piece, write something identical in every respect; and, although they do not always copy the title, they manage to lead their patrons to believe that they have obtained the original play for representation at their theatres. I once knew a prompter who boasted that he copied every manuscript that was intrusted to his care. He would sit up all night to do his unlawful work, and, when an opportunity occurred, he would sell a copy, for a few shillings, to the manager of a small theatre, who wanted a big bill for a Saturday night's performance. Frequently, stars, who were engaged at the theatre where this model prompter was employed, used skeleton manuscripts—that is, copies of their pieces containing all the characters except the leading part. This did not deter the thief from obtaining approximately correct copies of these plays. He would watch the business at night, and take down the leading actor's speeches in abbreviated long-hand. In that way he filled up the gaps which occurred in his copies of the skeleton manuscripts.

Authors' fees vary from nothing to ten per cent. on the gross receipts. There are plenty of the "great

unacted" who would agree to any conditions in order to get their works before the public. Some dramatic authors will write a drama to order for a certain sum down and a royalty of one or two guineas a night whenever the piece is played. Mr. Charles Reade's terms were ten per cent. on the gross receipts, which is a very fair arrangement for a manager of a theatre. If the piece is a failure, the author does not take ruinous fees; while, if the play turns out a great success, both author and manager benefit thereby. In dramatic authorship, as well as in everything else, the great secret of success is success, and the man who once hits the taste of the public can ever afterwards find a ready market for subsequent productions.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORNAMENTS OF THE PROFESSION.

Mr. and Mrs. Kendal—The Management of the St. James's Theatre—Mr. Barry Sullivan at Rehearsal—The Tragedian and the "Gagging" Comedian — Mr. John Coleman: his Attempt to found a Home for the Legitimate Drama—His School for Actors: his proper Sphere —Mr. J. L. Toole: his Popularity on and off the Stage— The Theatre Royal, Edinburgh—Toole and Irving— Miss Braddon as an Actress—Miss Ada Cavendish— Ladies and Gentlemen who adorn the Profession—Mr. Henry Irving: his Ideal Standard—The Greatest Reformer in the History of the Stage.

LEST the reader should, after perusing the first half of this book, imagine that there are no respectable men and women connected with the dramatic profession, I will now endeavour to show the bright as well as the dark side of the picture, and give an unexaggerated account of a few of the ornaments of the profession. I have written at some length upon the black sheep of the theatrical world, and it is but fair to notice the few artistes whose sole aim is to purge the stage of the nastiness which has brought the actor's calling into bad repute.

It affords me much pleasure to be able to state, without fear of contradiction, that the most charming

actress of our time is a model of a pure-minded Englishwoman. Mrs. Kendal's life will bear the most searching inquiry, her character is spotless, and her sole aim is to raise the tone of the drama, and make the theatre what it ought to be—a school of ethics, as well as a place of amusement.

She is assisted in her good work by her husband, who is almost as great a favourite with the public as his amiable and accomplished wife. The St. James's Theatre has undergone a complete metamorphosis since it fell into the hands of the present management. Formerly, the house in King Street was associated with mushroom managers, questionable adaptations from the French, fiascos, and amateur exhibitions. An empty treasury was more frequently the rule than the exception. Now the St. James's Theatre is second to none in Great Britain. It may be compared, in some respects, to the Comédie Française, particularly in the perfection of the casts put up by Messrs. Hare and Kendal. The most fastidious patron of histrionic art may be certain of seeing every character adequately represented at the St. James's, even to the footman who brings on a letter, and has only one line to speak. Mr. Gilbert's typical young lady of fifteen will be quite safe here—nay, more, she will probably derive more benefit in a moral sense from Mrs. Kendal's acting than she will get from her governess's stereotyped lessons at home. In the front of the St. James's Theatre there are no harpies to tear your coat off your back, seize your hat, or charge you sixpence for a programme that costs thirty shillings a thousand at Rimmel's. Before

the house opens, a programme is placed on every seat, and the attendants wear an ivory badge, to prevent the stupid mistakes so frequent in theatres, in consequence of the swallow-tail being *de rigueur* for waiters as well as evening dress. All over the establishment there is an air of genuine respectability which is quite refreshing to the satiated aristocrats who are always in search of novelty.

It will be interesting to inquire into the pedigree of the charming leading actress of the St. James's Theatre.

Mrs. Kendal has been associated with the stage from her infancy. Her father was the manager of one of the old circuits, and his two highly-talented children, Tom and Madge, experienced all the hardships incidental to provincial theatrical life. Mrs. Kendal is one of the few who can touch pitch without being defiled. She knows only too well the rotten state of the British drama; and she risks sneers and taunts from the Shelbys and others, who are always ready to accuse of prudery any actress who strives to elevate the stage and discourage licentiousness and drunkenness.

As a pattern of industry and sobriety, Mr. Barry Sullivan is almost without a rival. He has never swerved from the determination of his youthful days—to stick to the legitimate. He has earned his reputation by his masterly interpretation of Shakespeare's sublime creations; and his *répertoire* does not include a single modern production.

I have known him play Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard, and the Gamester, without touching a glass of either beer or spirits. I am not quite certain what Mr.

Sullivan's favourite beverage is, but I believe I have seen him drink lemonade or barley-water between the acts of a tragedy. He is a living proof that a man can perform great feats of mental and physical exertion without the aid of stimulants.

Mr. Barry Sullivan is not very popular with the male section of the profession, for several reasons. He never excuses drunkenness, fluffy rehearsals, wilful carelessness, gag, or levity behind the scenes, during either a rehearsal or a performance. He is a strict disciplinarian, and never permits undue familiarity on the part of the members of his company. He has no mercy for the impudent novice who comes to a last rehearsal with his part in his hand. He is no believer in the "all-right-at-night" theory. Everything must be all right in the morning. Drunken stage-carpenters and negligent property-men curse him, and inattentive actors and actresses circulate all sorts of false reports about him. Indeed, before I met Mr. Sullivan, his name suggested in my mind a kind of ogre, who disturbed the peace of every theatre he visited—so many dressing-room stories had I heard in which Mr. Barry Sullivan was the hero. My own experience of this eminent tragedian contrasted agreeably with the lying reports of my stage companions. If I had been fortunate enough to meet Mr. Sullivan at the commencement of my career, I should have been saved many years of toil and degradation. I found him a true martinet; but to any actor, no matter how humble his position might be, he was most kind and gentle when he knew that the man was trying to do his best. I have known Mr. Sullivan's finest dramatic

situations ruined by young actors, who, through nervousness, have either forgotten some particular bit of business or failed to give the proper cue. At the end of the act, when some poor fellow has gone to the tragedian's dressing-room to apologise for his short-comings, instead of black looks and a curse, he has received kind words of encouragement.

On one occasion, when a persevering young actor ruined a grand scene in a Shakespearian play, I heard Mr. Sullivan interrupt his apology, when the curtain fell, with the following words:

"My dear boy, you did your best. You were a little nervous. You will do better next time."

The play of "As You Like It" was being performed at a provincial theatre in the Midland counties one evening. Mr. Sullivan enacted the *rôle* of the melancholy Jaques. Touchstone was represented by one of those clowns who always say more than is set down for them. This particular comedian thought he could improve upon the author. In the wrestling scene, when the wrestler was thrown, he had to say, in reply to the duke:

"He cannot speak, my lord."

In order to obtain a laugh, the comedian distorted his features, and exclaimed:

"He *says* he cannot speak, my lord."

When the act-drop fell, Mr. Sullivan went over to where the comedian was standing, and said: "Touchstone was a fool, but not a d——d fool as you have made him. You have obtained a laugh, sir; but you have spoilt your part."

Mr. Sullivan's rehearsals were rare treats to pains-

taking actors. Although he always played the same pieces, he never grew tired of directing the stage business. Important situations were tried over and over again, until the various characters concerned could run through them as if they moved on wheels or in well-leaded grooves. At the end of an important scene, such as the last act of "The Gamester," Mr. Sullivan invariably thanked the ladies and gentlemen for their attention. He would often show actors some clever bit of business, which improved their parts, and gained for them a larger percentage of laughter or applause than they would have received if they had trusted to their own unaided impersonations. When actors were inattentive at rehearsal Mr. Sullivan used to say: "Here am I teaching you in one morning that which has taken me years of hard labour and study to acquire, and you haven't the common courtesy to listen to me."

Even Mr. Sullivan's detractors were bound to admit that his stage fights were most realistic, and totally unlike the absurd combats usually arranged by stage-managers. The fight between Richard III. and Richmond always drew a big audience behind, as well as in front. It was short, but remarkably effective. I never knew Mr. Sullivan to allow the part of Richmond to be doubled with any other character. I suppose that he considered the fight with himself quite enough to exhaust one of the present generation of actors.

This tragedian was a good master to his servants. He once set up in business a dresser who had served him faithfully for some years. If I am not mistaken, he made the man a present of one hundred pounds to

purchase the good-will of a tobacconist's shop. Barry Sullivan was rarely seen in the day-time when there was no call, *i.e.*, rehearsal. He usually stayed at the principal hotel in each town, and lived very quietly. At night, after the performance, there was generally a crowd at the stage-door to see him enter his cab, and a hearty cheer followed him as he drove away from the theatre. He was never known to invite the members of the company of a theatre where he was starring to drink with him at a neighbouring public-house. If he had imitated poor Charles Dillon, he would, perhaps, have earned the title of "jolly good fellow"; but he would not have been blessed with almost perfect health, or a handsome balance at his bankers.

Mr. John Coleman, who appears to have retired from the stage, whether temporarily or permanently I am unable to state, has done much to raise the tone of the drama. His lavish production of Shakespeare's "Henry V." at the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, a few years ago, although it turned out a financial failure, deserves to be recorded as an artistic success, and it is to be regretted that the author of "Curly" should have been allowed to lose the whole of his fortune, without an attempt being made by the profession to show their appreciation of his efforts to found a home for the legitimate drama in London.

In these days of testimonial performances, I do not think that Old Drury could be used for a better purpose than a complimentary benefit to the veteran actor and manager, Mr. John Coleman. There are scores of actors and actresses who owe a share of their success to the

thorough training they received under this gentleman's management at Leeds, York, and elsewhere.

There is no better stage-manager in this country than Mr. Coleman. He can direct the rehearsal of any kind of play, including burlesque, ballet, and pantomime. He has at various times, to my knowledge, received novices into his theatres, and, besides giving them a thorough training in stage art, he has watched over them with fatherly care. As an actor, Mr. Coleman is seen at his best in the heroes of romantic drama. Like Mr. Barry Sullivan, he sets great value upon the business of a piece. I once had the pleasure of seeing him play Jean Valjean, in Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables." His first act deeply impressed me. Without speaking a word, he succeeded in riveting the attention of a large audience for a considerable time. The business of the part of the escaped galley-slave was most cleverly contrived and not a bit unnatural. I should like to see some of the drawing-room actors of the present day attempt to fill out the music which was written for the first act of Mr. Coleman's version of "Les Misérables." Pantomimic action, although it may appear simple enough from the front of a theatre, is most difficult to perform with grace and facility. It is very easy for an actor after a little practice to enter a stage drawing-room and say, "Ah, my dear madam, I am so delighted to see you;" but let a young comedian who has never played out of a London comedy theatre try to fill out eight bars of music before he opens his mouth, and he will long to return to his cup-and-saucer pieces.

Mr. Coleman's rehearsals were always noted for their

length, as well as for their completeness of detail. Even after the production of a new play, the rehearsals were continued, so that no opportunity should be lost of improving the representations.

In a national theatre supported by the State, Mr. John Coleman would find the proper arena for the display of his exceptional talent as a director of high-class and legitimate entertainment.

The genial prince of comedians, as Mr. John Lawrence Toole has been styled, is another of the bright ornaments of the profession. In those scandal-mongers' shops, the dressing-rooms of theatres, where I have spent so many nights, I have never heard Mr. Toole's name coupled with an ill-natured expression. Although he has been at the top of the tree for many years, lauded by peers and princes, he has never once forgotten the friends of his early days, the men and women who knew him when he was only a stock low comedian in a provincial theatre. If any person wants a proof of his popularity in the theatrical world, an occasional glance at his programmes will suffice to show that he rarely changes his company. Year after year the same names appear in the casts of his pieces, and there is one excellent actress who would hardly like to say how many years she has supported Mr. Toole. Fathers and mothers can take their children to the little house in King William Street to enjoy a hearty laugh without fear of corruption. No vulgar jests or *double-entendre* is tolerated at Toole's Theatre—it is *the* house for genuine fun and innocent amusement. Mr. J. L. Toole was for some time the stock low comedian at the Theatre Royal,

Edinburgh. In the same company were Mr. Henry Irving, and Miss Braddon, the talented novelist. In the orchestra of that house were two musicians named Henry and George Loveday. Henry was the leader and George the first cornet.

At the present time Mr. Henry Loveday is Mr. Irving's stage-manager, and Mr. George Loveday has the entire direction of Mr. Toole's Theatre and touring arrangements. I have had nothing to do with Mr. Henry Loveday; but the fact of his connection with the Lyceum management is a sufficient guarantee of his private and professional character. He is well known as an able musician, and some time before and after his secession from the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, where he conducted the orchestra, he was the manager of an English opera company that travelled the provinces.

Mr. George Loveday is the *beau-idéal* of an acting-manager. He looks, and is, a perfect gentleman. He is devoted to Mr. Toole, and I am willing to risk an action for libel for stating that the popular comedian owes no small share of his financial success to the sound judgment of his faithful manager and friend.

Miss Ada Cavendish is a lady who has worked her way up from the ranks. She owes nothing to influence or patronage. She is a thorough artist, who feels every line she speaks. She is not universally liked by the members of the profession, because she will have her pieces properly mounted, well studied, and carefully acted. She has a great contempt for "fluffers," as careless and imperfect actors are called. She is a perfect mistress of stage art, and she usually conducts her own

rehearsals. I have known her take a seat at the prompt-table at ten o'clock in the morning and not leave the stage until two hours before the opening of the theatre. She can direct stage-carpenters and strike terror into the hearts of drunken property-men. She will have all the scenes set at rehearsal, and every stage or hand property must be forthcoming in the morning. I once knew a master-carpenter, who had been used to easy-going stars, after getting a good blowing-up from Miss Cavendish, fling down his hammer upon the stage, put on his jacket, and rush out of the theatre; when he returned he was very drunk, and had to be sent home. During a performance, Miss Ada Cavendish loses her own identity. She is for the time being the character she represents; and woe to the actor or actress who attempts small talk in the wings when she is ready for her entrance. Off the stage she is a most agreeable acquaintance. She is highly intellectual and well educated. Unfortunately, she does not enjoy the best of health, and it is more than probable that her years of hard labour and constant study are beginning to tell upon her constitution.

Among the ladies and gentlemen who adorn the theatrical profession are:—Mr. Wilson Barrett, the popular manager of the Princess's Theatre, whose admirable system of management has already been noticed; Mr. George Barrett, Miss Eastlake, Mr. Tom Mead, Mrs. Gaston Murray, Miss Ellen Terry, Mr. Stanislaus Calhaem, Miss Bateman (Mrs. Crowe) and her sisters, Mr. Lionel Brough, Mrs. Stirling, the Vokes Family, Mr. and Mrs. Pateman, Mr. W. Terriss, the Rignolds, Mrs. Carter, Mr. Edward Terry,

Mrs. Stephens, Mr. James Fernandez, Mrs. Leigh Murray, Mr. Hare, Mr. Maclean, Mr. J. L. Shine, and Miss Mary Anderson.

So much has been written about Mr. Henry Irving that it would be like painting the lily or gilding refined gold to add to what has already been done by abler pens than mine. He has set an example to managers which, if followed, would bring about a revolution in theatrical matters, and raise the actor's calling to the rank of a *real*, not a sham, profession.

In Henry Irving is blended the artist and the scholar. He is called the fashionable tragedian: he is something more than this. I have known several *fashionable* actors and actresses whose sole aim has been the accumulation of £. s. d., little caring for the future of the drama, so long as they made their fortunes quickly. The lessee of the Lyceum Theatre is striving to raise the drama and its representatives to his own ideal standard of perfection, which is far in excess of anything hitherto attempted, or even dreamt of, by the most enthusiastic well-wishers of the drama. By his example he has already stimulated others to follow in his wake. He has in a few short years almost cleared away the rock of prejudice which has taken centuries to accumulate; and, no matter what may be the final outcome of his labours, the name of Henry Irving will go down to posterity as the greatest reformer the stage has ever known since Thespis and his cart paraded the Athenian streets six centuries before the Christian era.

CHAPTER IX.

DRAMATIC CRITICISM.

Definition of a Dramatic Critic—Country Journalists—Theatrical Journals and their Critiques—A Gushing Notice of a Piece that was never played—Actors who write their own Notices—The Value of Local Critiques—Mutilation of a Critic's "Copy"—How to obtain Flattering Notices in the *Thespian*—A Dramatic Author who wrote the Critique of his own Play for a leading Journal—Champagne Suppers and Dramatic Critics—Unsuccessful Playwrights—The Frequent Consequences of Ill-natured Dramatic Criticism.

IN Arthur Reade's "Literary Success" the following definition of a dramatic critic is given.

"A dramatic critic must, as a first and positive requirement, be familiar with the pieces produced on the modern stage for at least the last fifteen years. He must have been a constant and intelligent student of the stage of to-day, its changes, developments, and retrogressions. He must be familiar with the temperament of audiences, in order that he may not be led away either by too liberal applause or by too hasty condemnation. He must closely follow all theatrical events, read as many plays, ancient and modern, as he can, and should know something of the art of dramatic construction. If he has tried to write pieces himself, it will be all the better, he will know the difficulty of expressing ideas dramatically and in logical sequence. The same

rule would apply to acting, and he will be better able to judge and appreciate good work if he has been an amateur actor, particularly if the stage-manager has been a man of experience! He must be a constant student of Schlegel. This is absolutely necessary, for in Schlegel he will get a learned and critical history of the rise and progress of the drama in all ages and countries—from the time of the early Greeks down to our present time. He must also devote time to the intelligent study of Lessing, and must on no account neglect to study with keen appreciation the criticisms of George Henry Lewes on modes of expression in the dramatic art. If he knows his Goëthe and Schiller (through translations will do) all the better. He ought to know his Shakespeare by heart, and should also possess a fair knowledge of the works of the Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists —Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Wycherley, Farquhar, Vanbrugh, Dryden, and so on. There are carefully-compiled works by the late Dr. Doran from which he will learn much notably 'Their Majesty's' servants published shortly before the learned Doctor's death. He ought to know something of general history, and have some idea as to historical costume. He should be a man of general culture, outside the range of the drama, and able to give an opinion upon art, particularly in painting and decoration. He should learn how plays frequently 'grow,' and are built up after they leave the author's hands, and have a nice discrimination as to the balance of character. A musical ear and an acquaintance with modern music will stand him in good stead; and it is absolutely neces-

sary that he should have a good temper, a large stock of patience, a good digestion, a facile literary style, a genuine love for the drama in itself, and a modicum of Christian charity and consideration for the feelings of others."

Where are we to look for this model dramatic critic? Certainly not in the provinces. Country journalists are, as a rule, lamentably ignorant on all matters concerning the stage; and the blunders they sometimes make in their so-called critiques sufficiently prove their inability to write a fair and critical notice of either play or players. The correspondents of one of the theatrical journals are either shopmen, clerks, or barbers. In a few of the large towns reporters engaged on local newspapers write notices for these papers, but the majority of the provincial "critiques" are written by men who know little or nothing about the stage. The only remuneration these "dramatic critics" receive is a copy of the journal they represent. The free admissions they get for the various places of amusement more than repay them for their miserable attempts at dramatic criticism.

In the days of the stock seasons, a leading actor, who had been a great favourite at the theatre where he was engaged, was surprised one night to find that the tide of public favour had turned against him. He was received with groans and hisses instead of rapturous applause. Long did he try to discover the cause of this unexpected change in the behaviour of his former admirers. At last he learnt the truth—he had changed his laundress! The dramatic critic of the *Thespian* was the son of his old washerwoman. In some country towns the reporter's

ticket is given to a compositor; and I have known a printer's devil represent himself as correspondent for a local journal. A few years ago "Black-eyed Susan" was announced to be played at the Amphitheatre, Liverpool. The morning after the supposed performance, a glowing notice of the old nautical drama and the acting of each character appeared in the columns of one of the leading Liverpudlian journals.

The joke was, that "Black-eyed Susan" was postponed in consequence of the illness of the gentleman who was cast for the part of William. The "critic" who wrote the gushing notice had copied the cast from the bill of the play, and his imagination supplied the rest.

Local reporters frequently invite actors to write their own notices; and this practice will account for the columns of fulsome flattery reprinted by third-rate artistes and sent to the managers of theatres and editors of newspapers. Few good managers nowadays pay the least attention to "Opinions of the Press," unless the notices emanate from the critics of such journals as the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Standard*, *Morning Post*, *Athenæum*, *Truth*, or *The World*. Critiques copied from the *Thespian* or the *Stoke Pogis Gazette* are only read for the sake of raising a laugh. A few years ago I made the acquaintance of a journalist who had just accepted office as the dramatic critic of the *Thespian*. He was a bold and fearless writer, and he did not care a jot for the opinions of the actors and actresses of the town where he was located. It was his practice to keep rough copies of the notices he sent to the *Thespian*. One day, after I had chaffed him about the notice of

a play in which I took a part, he produced his pocket-book, and begged me to read the original notice as written by him and sent to the editor of the *Thespian*. It was something like the following:—

Extract from Original Notice.	*As the Notice appeared in the "Thespian."*
"The leading female *rôle* was misrepresented by that very pretty but incapable actress, Miss Eva St. Clair, whose gaucherie and insipid style was very painful to the audience," &c., &c.	"The leading female *rôle* was admirably represented by that very pretty and capable actress, Miss Eva St. Clair, whose charming style had a marked effect upon the audience," &c., &c.

"But," I exclaimed, "you surely won't stand that sort of thing?"

"Not for long," was the reply. "The editor will have to get a barber's clerk or a draper's assistant to write his notices if he mutilates another line of my copy. Don't you know the reason why Miss Eva St. Clair never has a word of adverse criticism in the *Thespian?*"

"I can guess. She advertises regularly."

"You've hit it! She spends half her salary in reproducing the absurd notices written by her acting manager, and handed to the reporters of local journals, at the bars of hotels, and at the back of the boxes of the theatre."

Not a great many years ago there lived two popular writers; one was a dramatist, the other the dramatic critic of a leading daily paper. They were fast friends, and it was generally believed that the journal represented by the critic was like Cæsar's wife, and its representative unapproachable. The dramatist wrote a

play, which was produced at a London theatre with great success. On the night of the production, these two friends, who had been dining together, appeared behind the scenes, and revelled in the success of the drama.

Over a bottle of champagne, the critic, who was hardly equal to writing a column after the fall of the curtain, hinted to his friend that, if he liked to act as his deputy, he would be willing to transfer his duties to the lucky dramatist. The offer was accepted, and the splendid notice which appeared the following morning in the columns of that powerful journal was WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR!!! The greater portion of dramatic criticism is done in a very slip-shod manner, and the majority of the "critics" are totally unfit for the duties they are called upon to fulfil. There are, it is true, a number of gentlemen in London who are capable of writing good critiques, but few representatives of provincial journals are competent to judge either the merits of a play or the talents of the players.

When popular managers cease giving champagne suppers to literary men, and acting-managers give up "working the press," then we may look forward to something like *impartial criticism*. The representatives of the press ought to preserve their *incog.*, and it would be well if the proprietors of high-class journals refused the complimentary admissions sent by managers, and instructed their dramatic critics to pay for their seats. This plan, I believe, has already been adopted by the *Times*, whose representative is able to feel perfectly independent and free to give an unbiassed opinion of the

play he is called upon to criticise. Disappointed dramatic authors have ere now joined conspiracies to damn the works of their successful rivals. Not many years ago the author of "Never too late to Mend" obtained £200 damages for a malicious notice of one of his plays. It came out at the trial that one of the critics was the author of a piece whose work was shelved to make room for Mr. Reade's play. It is an alarming state of affairs when the fate of authors, managers, and actors depends upon the whims of unsuccessful journalists. The remedy is in the hands of the proprietors of newspapers, who ought not to engage as dramatic critic any unsuccessful playwright whose disposition has been soured by failure or the refusal of his own dramatic works. Such a man will make a bad critic, and he will be only too ready to damn the works of rising young authors, making them smart for his own misfortunes.

Theatrical managers know well enough the importance of a notice in a good daily newspaper. It has often been said that public approval is the best kind of criticism; but I have known bad business to follow when a first night has gone with every sign of success, so far as the public were concerned. There happened to be a solitary individual in the stalls who did not join in the general applause. The next morning the opinion of this one amongst three thousand appeared, and was read by a quarter of a million of people. That notice kept thousands of playgoers from the theatre, and ruined the manager. There were two thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine people in the theatre on the first night who

praised the piece, but their opinions did not extend beyond their own contracted sphere. The one man who dissented from the rest had the power to decide the fate of author and manager. The readers of the journal he represented believed in his judgment, and shunned the theatre. A *Times* critique has been known either to make or damn a play. It can fill a theatre in the dog-days, or empty one in the middle of the season. Amongst the dramatic critics who have proved to the profession and the public that they thoroughly understand their business are Mr. Henry Labouchere, Mr. E. L. Blanchard, Mr. William Archer, Mr. Clement Scott, Mr. Godfrey Turner, Mr. Sampson, and Mr. Austin Brereton.

Knowing their power, dramatic critics ought to be careful how they wield it. While considering their duty to their employers and the public, they should not forget, for one moment, the effect of their praise or censure upon author, actor, and manager.

Despair, ignominy, and ruin are the frequent consequences of ill-natured or unfair dramatic criticism.

CHAPTER X.

ENGLISH ACTORS IN AMERICA.

Mr. J. L. Toole in the United States—Mr. Henry Irving's Reception in America—The Americans and Shakespeare —Pilgrims at Stratford-on-Avon—Washington Irving at the Poet's Birthplace—Toole at Stratford-on-Avon— Miss Mary Anderson's Love of Shakespeare — Her Generous Gift to the Memorial Theatre — American Actors in England—Jefferson—Booth—Minnie Palmer— Mary Anderson—Lawrence Barrett—The Blondes in America—English Ballet and Chorus Ladies astonish the Yankees — Mrs. Rousby's Failure — The British Actor's El Dorado.

ENGLISH actors of repute are, as a rule, enthusiastically received in the United States. The only eminent *artiste* I have ever known to regret his visit to America is Mr. J. L. Toole, who returned with anything but a favourable impression of the treatment he experienced during his stay with our American cousins.

Mr. Toole is essentially an English comedian, and his cockneyisms may not have appeared so funny to the New York playgoer as they do to the patrons of the little house at Charing Cross. The piece in which he opened was not suited to the American taste. It is more than probable that, if Mr. Toole had substituted one of his old stock comedies for "Wig and Gown," he would have scored a big success. It is certainly to be regretted that our popular comedian did not "strike ile" in that country, where so many English actors have

found an El Dorado. His friend, Mr. Henry Irving, fared differently. In all the cities he visited he was received with as much homage as would be accorded to a potent monarch—perhaps more, for Americans care very little for crowned heads. The reason why Mr. Irving's success was so much greater than Mr. Toole's may be traced to the pieces played by the eminent tragedian. It is a noteworthy fact that Shakespeare is better appreciated and more widely read in America than he is in the land of his birth. The great actors of the United States have always trusted to the Bard of Avon to make their fame and fortunes; and any English actor who can give a fair interpretation of the leading *rôles* of the popular plays of William Shakespeare is certain of a warm welcome on the Western Continent. I made a pilgrimage this year to Stratford-on-Avon, and my first visit was to the old house in Henley Street, where the poet was born. I was received by two well-bred old ladies, who were so unlike the guides one usually meets at noted show-places that I could not resist the temptation to ask some questions about the kind of visitors they had to deal with, where they came from, and how they behaved when they trod that classic ground.

"Oh," exclaimed one of the guides, "we have all sorts of visitors from various parts of the world, but America sends us more pilgrims than any other country, England included."

"Are the Americans very enthusiastic?"

"'Enthusiastic' is not the word, sir. They worship the name of Shakespeare; and when they come here they are not ashamed to show their devotion."

These two ladies, who are so eminently fitted for their office, then told me many interesting stories of American visitors. One distinguished clergyman, they said, spent a considerable time pacing the poet's bedroom, declaiming "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" in a tremulous voice. Another old gentleman sat in the chimney-corner and sobbed aloud. His pleasant guide, thinking he was ill, asked if she could do anything for him. He begged her not to notice him; he was well enough. He was overcome with emotion, that was all! Many American travellers were so enchanted with the quiet Warwickshire town that it was with difficulty they could tear themselves away. Few were satisfied with one visit to the house and the grave. Years ago—long before the Corporation of Stratford thought of purchasing the house in Henley Street—Washington Irving wrote, after his visit to the tomb of Shakespeare: "As I trod the sounding pavement, there was something intense and thrilling in the idea that, in very truth, the remains of Shakespeare were mouldering beneath my feet. It was a long time before I could prevail upon myself to leave the place; and, as I passed through the churchyard, I plucked a branch from one of the yew-trees, the only relic that I have brought from Stratford."

Guided by the same inspiration that led Washington Irving to Stratford-on-Avon, hundreds of his countrymen—"dollar-making Yankees," as they are sometimes called—find their way to the town where rests our great dramatist.

Not so many English actors visit Stratford as might be supposed. The chief excuse is that the railway

accommodation is so bad, and the trains so awkwardly timed, that dramatic companies playing in Birmingham, the nearest place of importance, cannot do the pilgrimage and get back in time for the performance in the evening. What must the Americans think of English actors who cannot find time, once in their lives, to make a special journey to the birthplace of Shakespeare? I was informed that Mr. J. L. Toole was devotedly attached to Stratford. Whenever he was in the neighbourhood, he rarely failed to show his genial face at the quaint old house in Henley Street. Miss Mary Anderson was not satisfied with a brief visit. She made Stratford-on-Avon her resting-place when she was not acting, paying daily visits to the house, the tomb, and the memorial theatre. She made such an impression upon the kind sisters who are in charge of the precious dwelling, that the old ladies declared they had never met with a more charming young lady than the successful American comédienne.

Miss Anderson proved her devotion to the memory of the great poet, on August 29, 1885, by producing "As You Like It" at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon, and generously giving the whole of the receipts towards a fund now being collected for the decoration of the building.

This love of our immortal poet will account for the success of English Shakesperian actors in America. But why do American actors often fail to draw the English playgoing public?

It has been said that there is in England a prejudice against American actors.

There is no prejudice; but the English playgoing public seem to lack the enthusiasm of their warm-hearted cousins. Booth was not a great pecuniary success in this country. Why? Simply because he only acted in legitimate plays; and it is hardly to be expected that, if our own leading actors cannot (with one or two exceptions) make money out of Shakespeare, American artistes will succeed where native talent fails. All professional men must regret the cool reception Mr. Lawrence Barrett met with in London about a year since. In spite of the banquet given to the eminent American actor by Mr. Wilson Barrett, notwithstanding the hearty welcome he received from English artistes, his venture was a dire failure. Some said it was the piece, and others blamed the representatives of the Press. Whatever may have been the cause of the bad business at the Lyceum during Mr. Lawrence Barrett's sojourn in England, there can be no two opinions about his qualifications. His great dramatic ability was apparent to those persons who were competent to judge, and it is to be regretted that the man who was the first to welcome our favourite tragedian on the other side of the Atlantic should, in Mr. Irving's own theatre, meet with such a poor reception from English playgoers. Mr. Lawrence Barrett adequately expressed the feeling of cultured Americans towards the mother-country in a speech at the Langham Hotel on April 2, 1884, when he said, "There is not a record, not a book that has been written, not a line composed by a poet of England, that is not the inheritance of every American."

The reader may wish to remind me that, if several

American actors have failed to "set the Thames on fire," others have achieved great artistic and pecuniary successes. Granted; but not with the legitimate. Jefferson, with his faultless impersonation of Rip Van Winkle; Minnie Palmer, in her bright comedy, "My Sweetheart"; and, lately, Miss Mary Anderson, who owes much to her unimpeachable private character, her beauty, and the art of photography, although her talent is undeniable. The American stage has not escaped the invasion of the black sheep who have done so much to injure the profession in this country. I have now before me illustrated New York journals, containing detailed accounts of the doings of the English "blondes," as the burlesque troupes were styled. Some of the ladies astonished the go-ahead Yankees, who are not remarkable for their squeamishness. English ballet and chorus ladies were made the subjects of illustrations, showing the dark side of New York life. The scenes of dissipation in which many of the "blondes" played prominent parts are recorded in the annals of the American stage, as well as the triumphs of our distinguished legitimate actors.

American managers do not always enrich themselves over the engagements they make with British artistes. Maurice Grau lost money by Mrs. Rousby, the talentless lady with a beautiful face, who found to her cost that the Yankees expected something more than exquisite dresses, lovely features, and an unsteady gait. The lavish hospitality of the Americans has been several times abused; but the rage for British talent has not yet abated, and, although their stage can boast of many bright

stars, distinguished English actors and actresses are always certain of an enthusiastic reception, and a harvest of dollars whenever they choose to visit the hospitable shores of the New World.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW TO REFORM THE STAGE.

Professor Blackie and the Stage—Representative Actors—The Disease and the Remedy—How the Stage is Recruited—The Art of Graceful Gesticulation—Gaucherie on the Stage—The proposed Dramatic College—Mr. C. E. Flower, of Stratford-on-Avon—Mr. Tom Taylor's Views — The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre — The Library and Picture-gallery—How to Make the Stage a great Moral Instructor.

IN the preceding pages I have endeavoured to prove that the English stage is for the most part corrupt. Amongst its professors there are so many black sheep that the white are hardly perceptible. To effect a complete reform something more is necessary than the devoted labours of a few honourable ladies and gentlemen, who, like Mr. Henry Irving, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, and Mr. Wilson Barrett, have set themselves to bridge the chasm which has so long separated the theatrical profession from the rest of society. It has been stated by a venerable Scotch divine that the clergy of this country have put themselves in a false position, and they must wheel right-about, if they mean to do any good. I hardly agree with the learned professor on that point. The clergy dare not openly hold out the hand of fellowship to the whole of the theatrical profession, knowing too well the present standard of morality of its members and the disastrous results that would follow such a union. Individual

actors and actresses, whose moral characters shine as brilliantly as their talents, are now received in the best society, not excluding royalty; but it cannot be denied that nine-tenths of the theatrical world have to remain contented with their own contracted sphere. It is the common complaint of actors and actresses that they number few friends who are not, in some way or other, connected with the stage. I once heard an old manager say, "I have been in the profession more than half a century, and I do not know one person in any of the towns I have visited who would give me a night's lodging if I wanted it." There was much truth in the old man's lamentation. He knew scores of playgoers who were glad enough to meet him in the theatre saloon, or at one of the hotels after the performance; but they never dreamt of extending their hospitality to their own homes.

In the course of my experience I have observed that the actor's friends are generally men of shady reputation, and fast youths in search of the shortest cut to the dogs. It is not difficult to trace the cause of the exclusion of the actor from the homes of respectable citizens. While the heroes of the stage are represented by such monsters as Shelby, while managers of the Bordenave type are allowed to convert their theatres into traps for the inexperienced youth of this country, and so long as talented virtue has to make way for vicious incompetency, "the middle wall of partition," which Professor Blackie says "has been artificially raised in England between the pulpit and the stage," will never be broken down.

The stage of this country, in spite of the few noble

reformers before mentioned, has never been so corrupt as it is at the present moment. It is all very well for the learned professor of Greek to get enthusiastic over the splendid productions of Henry Irving or the pathos of Miss Bateman. To pick out two of the brightest ornaments of the profession, and to set them up as fair specimens of the representatives of the modern stage is as absurd as pointing to Professor Blackie as a representative Greek scholar. It is very kind and praiseworthy to make a bold stand against popular prejudice; but, before a man writes about an important matter, he ought to make it his business to study his subject in all its details. Let us suppose that a person who has heard something about the evils of the stage, but who has never before been inside a theatre in his life, obtains his first impressions of the drama and modern acting by visiting the Lyceum and witnessing the finished performances of Mr. Henry Irving, Miss Ellen Terry, and the rest of the talented artistes who appear in "Olivia," why, he would be charmed, and ever after become the champion of the British stage, unless he turned a sort of special commissioner and put the charges made by the detractors of the stage to the test of experiment. Professor Blackie, his mind full of "Hamlet," "Leah," and "The Bells," says, "Unless the God of nature and the God of the Bible be two different deities,—which, I think Bishop Butler proved triumphantly they are not, — then the drama is fundamentally from God as much as the sermon, and the stage is a divine institution no less than the pulpit." There I agree with him. The drama is a divine institution, and the actor might be as great, if not

a greater, moral teacher than the parson, if his creed were based on the same foundation, and his sole aim only to "show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"; but, while the stage resembles the Dead Sea fruit, all bloom on the outside but rotten at the core, the drama will never become a true moral guide, nor the stage a recognised and honourable profession.

Having diagnosed the disease, it only remains to suggest a remedy. The stage is at present recruited from all ranks of society. Youths who might have become good shoemakers or tailors give up the last and the shop-board for a precarious living in the "slums." Without knowing the value of an aspirate or the difference between blank verse and prose, they expect to earn a competency by murdering the Queen's English. Stage-struck linen-drapers' and merchants' clerks give up tape-measuring and quill-driving to air their vanity before a long-suffering public. Empty-headed swells join the ranks of Thespis, vainly thinking that their purses will make up for their lack of brains. In fact, the stage of this country is open to any one who can, parrot-like, repeat a few lines of a modern play. Their *entrée* is effected in various ways; the shoemakers and tailors first go on the stage as supers, and, after a while, look out for engagements in booths or fourth-rate theatres. The shopmen and clerks pay premiums to unprincipled agents, who transfer them to mushroom managers. The wealthy stage-struck youths either start as managers of travelling companies, or offer heavy bribes for berths in third-rate troupes. There is no educational

test in the provinces—no testimonials as to private character offered or asked for. In London, of course, and particularly at good theatres, illiterate actors and actresses stand a poor chance of rising to the top of the profession. A man or a woman must be a real genius to overcome the disadvantages of a neglected education. A certain percentage of highly-cultured ladies and gentlemen adopt the stage; but, even when they are not destitute of talent, a long time must necessarily elapse before they become proficient in the art of graceful gesticulation. To be perfectly natural in a real drawing-room is one thing—to adapt the conventionalities of every-day life to the stage is so difficult that hundreds fail where one or two succeed. I once met a stage-struck youth whose whole life had been spent amongst the Upper Ten Thousand. He was the most graceful waltzer any lady could desire, and he seemed a perfect master of the art of deportment, outside the theatre. But the moment he stepped upon the stage his *gaucherie* was apparent to the least critical playgoer in front.

The first step in the direction of theatrical reform must be the establishment of a dramatic college, properly endowed and conducted, on the same principles as the great professional schools of this country. There should be no by-roads to the stage. Every aspirant to histrionic fame ought to pass through the college. The first test of fitness should be an educational examination; then the novice might enter for a short term, and, if at the end of his period of probation the professors were of opinion that the student showed no signs of talent, they ought to have the power to request him to leave the institution,

and to give up the idea of entering the dramatic profession. If, on the other hand, the pupil exhibited signs of his fitness for the mimic art, he should be allowed to continue his studies for a term of three or four years. There ought to be a theatre in connection with the college, where performances of legitimate plays could be given at intervals, for the purpose of testing the opinion of the public on the acting of the students. At the close of their term, diplomas might be given to the pupils, who should be compelled to produce the proof of their qualifications before they were allowed to take engagements in regular theatres.

This is no wild scheme of my own; it was proposed by Mr. Charles E. Flower, of Stratford-on-Avon, in 1874, when that generous and devoted admirer of the great poet presented the site for the Memorial Theatre, the most fitting monument to the memory of Shakespeare it is possible to conceive. It was Mr. Flower's original idea, evidently with a view of reforming the stage. In his first prospectus he stated that any sum that might be raised beyond the amount required for the building, and any profit that might be realised by the rental on ordinary occasions, would be applied, after defraying the necessary expenses and establishment, to the celebration of the anniversary of the poet's birthday, *and to the promotion and improvement of legitimate acting by the establishment of prizes for essays upon the subject, lectures, and ultimately a dramatic training-school or college.*

Here was a noble proposition. In addition to the site, Mr. Flower gave about £5,000 towards the building, and he further promised to add £1,000 to every £1,000

subscribed by the public. Several well-known managers and actors rallied round Mr. C. E. Flower, including Edwin Booth, the American tragedian, the late J. B. Buckstone, F. B. Chatterton, the late E. A. Sothern, the late Benjamin Webster, Mr. Henry Irving, Mr. William Creswick, and Mr. Barry Sullivan. At the laying of the foundation-stone the late Tom Taylor said: "This theatre ought to be in connection with a school from which its company should be recruited. . . . In this school promising stage talent should be developed under competent training; its scholars taught reverence for their art while learning it; permitted to play the small parts first, and gradually rising to more and more important ones as they showed their power, but made to respect their art in the smallest parts as in the greatest —a worthy employment of their art. Who knows but some day the site of such a school might be chosen at Stratford with this new theatre for its training-ground, and Shakespeare's haunting presence for its tutelary spirit?"

The Memorial Theatre, a beautiful building designed after the old Globe, at Bankside, where Shakespeare produced his immortal works, was opened on April 23, 1879. Mr. Barry Sullivan, Lady Martin, and other eminent artistes, who journeyed to Stratford to do honour to the memory of the bard, took part in the inaugural performances. The theatre now contains a library and a picture-gallery; the only part of the project not yet completed is the school for training ladies and gentlemen of promise for the stage. So much has already been done, thanks to the noble exertions of Mr.

C. E. Flower, the ex-mayor of Stratford, it now remains for all who have the welfare of the stage at heart to aid Mr. Flower in completing his scheme. A bill for the regulation of places of public entertainment might be introduced in the Commons by one of the many patrons of the drama to be found in the legislative assembly; but to make the reformation complete the playgoing public must encourage art, and refuse to recognise theatres where the stage is made an excuse for immorality. Let the leaders of society publicly show their disapprobation of anything suggestive of the impure, either in word or gesture. Then the actor's calling will be exalted to the rank of a *real* profession, and the stage will become a great moral instructor, "the applause, delight, and wonder of mankind."

CHAPTER XII.

A WARNING VOICE FROM THE STAGE.

The Object of this Book—Amateur Clubs: Dangerous Institutions—The Fate of Untalented Actors—The Merchant's Clerk who went upon the Stage—Dissipation, Disease, and Death—Sober Mediocrity—Theatrical Subscriptions—Swindling Agents—Advertising Impostors—The Overcrowded State of the Profession—The Stage a Delusion and a Snare—Conclusion.

AFTER twenty years' experience in theatres of all kinds, from the lowest to the highest, it will, I presume, be admitted, even by persons who may be disposed to question my views, that I can fairly claim to know something about theatrical life. This WARNING VOICE FROM THE STAGE does not come from one who has obtained his information second-hand, but from one who has had excellent opportunities of forming a correct opinion on all matters relating to life behind the scenes; and his sincere regret is that he cannot paint his pictures of the modern stage in brighter colours. The sole object of this book is to warn the youth of this country, who think of adopting the theatrical profession, by pointing out the temptations and the hardships they will have to encounter even if they have a modicum of talent, and to entreat those who are destitute of histrionic ability to pause before they take a step which is certain to end in lifelong misery or premature death. Amateur clubs are very dangerous institutions. The

members who meet with enthusiastic receptions from their acquaintances mistake friendly applause for public opinion. Clerks, who would be contented with their stools if they were told the truth, become dissatisfied with their vocations after a so-called dramatic success, and worse still, if their attempts at acting are favourably noticed by the press, they seldom rest until they become recognised professionals. Some of the best actors have graduated on the amateur stage; but how many have degenerated into booth ranters, how many have sunk into the lowest depths of dissipation. I will relate one wretched failure out of the scores which have come under my notice. A few years ago I was introduced to a merchant's clerk, who had played a part in an amateur performance to the satisfaction of his frends and companions. He was thoroughly stage-struck, and nothing would convince him that he was not a born actor. He became a regular hanger-on at the theatres, and spent all his pocket-money in treating actors and check-takers. He used to boast that he could get free admissions to certain houses; but he failed to add that each order cost him about five times the amount charged at the doors. When I first met this youth, he was in perfect health, well dressed, and of gentlemanly manner. He laughed at me when I spoke of the hardships he would meet with if he succeeded in gratifying his ambition. I gave him a little of my own experience, but he paid no attention to my croakings, as he termed the advice I offered him. He was sure that an actor's life was "an awfully jolly one," with lots of fun, plenty of money, and not much work. He succeeded in obtaining an engagement

at a small theatre, in a town between Manchester and Liverpool, and soon afterwards I lost sight of him. Two years later, while I was waiting at a railway station in the West of England for a branch-line train, I was accosted by a shabbily-dressed, cadaverous-looking young man, with a dirty short clay-pipe in his mouth. I saw at a glance that the poor fellow was in the last stage of consumption. He held out his hand and called me by my name.

"You have the advantage of me," I exclaimed.

"Don't you know me? Well, I *must* be altered! I am John Chetwynd, of Greatport?"

"Is it possible?"

"Ah, I regret not taking your advice now. I thought I could act, but I suppose I was mistaken, for I can't get out of the 'slums,' and my health is so bad, and my clothes are so shabby, that I do not believe any respectable manager would engage me."

Before we parted, young Chetwynd told me that he had lost all his good clothes and his jewellery. He had nothing but the suit he was then wearing, a pair of old tights, a couple of wigs, and a pair of boot-tops (sticking-plasters he called them). He had been leading a vagabond life for two years, and the combined effects of bad food, drink, and damp theatres had ruined his constitution. He was then on his way to a small town, where he was to open as Glavis in the "Lady of Lyons." One morning, six months afterwards, he was found dead in his bed by the landlord of a low public-house where he lodged.

The sober men with strong constitutions, who drag

out a weary existence, when they become too old to be of any use in a theatre, depend upon charity for the remainder of their days. When I was in the provinces subscription-lists were always being handed round by the prompter. I have seen as many as three white-haired, decrepid old actors waiting at the stage-door of a theatre at one time. It was pitiful to watch their anxious faces as the stage-manager or prompter returned with their begging letters and handed them the sums collected. These were men who never possessed any real talent, and their average earnings all their lives had not exceeded thirty shillings a week.

The majority of the "agents" and "managers" who advertise in the daily papers for gentlemanly amateurs are sharpers, who prey upon stage-struck youths for the sake of the money they can get out of them. They make all sorts of wild promises, and paint the stage in the brightest colours. It is only a short time since one of these rascals made an attempt to trade upon Mr. Henry Irving's great reputation by promising engagements at the Lyceum Theatre! Year after year foolish boys are induced to throw up good situations, and stage-struck young ladies are sent on the road to ruin by the unprincipled scoundrels who boast their influence with theatrical managers. The truth is, that responsible managers would as soon think of applying to a Servants' Registry Office for actors and actresses as to any of the fraternity who advertise in the daily papers for aspirants for dramatic fame. The stage is already overcrowded with incompetent men and women struggling for a bare existence. At the present moment, in London, there

are scores of capable actors and actresses walking about, vainly seeking engagements. The supply is always greater than the demand, and the result is starvation, disease, and a premature grave for many who have not the courage to withstand the allurements of the theatre. I have seen so much misery amongst the insignificant members of the profession that I cannot find language sufficiently strong to express my contempt for the wretches who induce young men (who might earn a competence in some other sphere) to disobey their parents, and sacrifice their future prospects for a calling which is precarious at the best; but, for persons who do not possess the requisite ability, for youths and girls who have not the least aptitude for acting, the stage is a delusion and a snare.

Without interest, it is not easy for an amateur to get a footing on the boards of a London theatre. He is obliged to go into the provinces; and what dens some of the country temples of the drama are! To quote the lamentation of a member of the "Silver King" Company now on tour: "Artists in some towns are thrown into cellars and cesspools unworthy the habitation of pigs. Actors are expected to appear in the height of fashionable attire if the exigences of the piece demand it, and to fall about the filthy floor, and destroy their garments, and smash their hats, and tear everything to rags, in meandering through low and narrow passages to the dressing-rooms, where they are not only shut in to inhale the exhalations from their own bodies, but those from the mass of spectators in the auditorium."

The sanitary arrangements of some provincial theatres,

says the *Era* of September 12, 1885, are far from being what they should be: "We know of a case in which a travelling company, sent out with one of the most prosperous and successful pieces of the day, had several of its members actually laid up and others severely indisposed," *through want of ventilation, and open drains behind the scenes*, "and, in another instance, the members of a travelling company were actually compelled, from the disgusting state of the drains at the back of the theatre, to dress in an adjoining house, and walk thence to the stage-door in their costumes, in order to avoid the danger of typhoid fever!

What must be the feelings of those well-bred youths who have left good homes when they first find themselves face to face with the stern realities of theatrical life—when they begin their professional career in such "death-traps" as the theatres referred to in the leading organ of the stage.

The facts related in the preceding pages are not a tithe of my own experience; but, if my pictures of modern theatrical life act as a deterrent to only a few infatuated youths and romantic young ladies, I shall be amply repaid for writing

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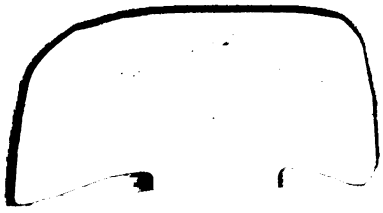
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